



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





600055230L

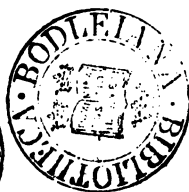
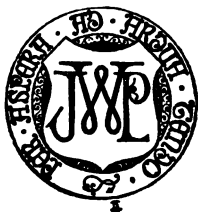


BENGALA:

OR,

SOME TIME AGO.

By MRS. VIDAL,
AUTHOR OF 'TALES FOR THE BUSH,' 'ESTHER MERLE,'
FLORENCE TEMPLAR,' ETC.



IN TWO VOLUMES.
VOL. I.

LONDON:
JOHN W. PARKER AND SON, WEST STRAND.
1860.

[The Author reserves the right of Translation.]

249. u. 215.

'If I should speak
She would mock me into air: O she would laugh me
Out of myself.'



It may possibly be deemed strange, if not presumptuous, that after the more recent and highly-coloured pictures of the same subject, this homelier and greyer tinted sketch should be brought forward. But though life is the same in one hemisphere as in another, the accidental and surrounding circumstances vary, and there is a more rapid and continual change in a new colony. To seize one of these shifting scenes—a transient period with its own peculiar characteristics, its hopes, fears, evils, and enjoyments—has been my endeavour, hoping that it may not be without interest even to those who, in the golden prospect of the Present, have well nigh forgotten “Some time ago.”—To those friends whose hospitality and kindness in a strange land is now a very pleasant memory, this story is dedicated.

M. T. V.

CONTENTS

OF

THE FIRST VOLUME.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. THE DISTRICT	1
II. NEIGHBOURS	17
III. LANGVILLE	35
IV. VINE LODGE	59
V. THE PETITION	69
VI. EXCITEMENT AMONG THE CONVICTS	78
VII. FROM A LADY'S BOUDOIR TO A CONVICT'S HUT	90
VIII. 'THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PANTRY'	102
IX. THE BURNING OFF	110
X. HOW THEY RIDE IN AUSTRALIA	119
XI. CURTAIN LECTURES	145
XII. A RAINY FOREGROUND AND RUIN IN PERSPECTIVE	153
XIII. LYNCH'S SKYLARK	165
XIV. BREAKING THE ICE	175
XV. 'COME BACK'	184
XVI. A BUSH NYMPH	195
XVII. THE LONDON THIEF SEEKS AMUSEMENT	204

CHAP.	PAGE
XVIII. MYSTERIOUS NEIGHBOURS	212
XIX. A BREEZE BEFORE BREAKFAST	237
XX. MYSTIFICATION	245
XXI. MR. LANG'S GUEST	260
XXII. THE PRIEST AND HIS PEOPLE	270
XXIII. THE WOLF AT THE DOOR	280
XXIV. STORMS WITHOUT AND WITHIN	290
XXV. SOMETHING IN THE WIND	303

BENGALA:

OR,

SOME TIME AGO.

CHAPTER I.

THE DISTRICT.

THE sun had reached the horizon, and the fringe of gum-trees on the edge of the hill was thrown out in strong relief by the bright, intense light behind, while the rest of the wooded country lay in shade.

The evening breeze was faintly rising, and stirred the leaves of bignonias and cedar-trees in front of a low, steep-roofed cottage, in the verandah of which a lady sat, alternately patting a huge kangaroo dog and speaking to a man who stood without the gate which separated the verandah from the yard.

‘Really, my good man, it is no use for you to stay! I have told you that my brother—that Mr. Herbert is not at home. He has been up the country.’

‘They say he’ll be back to-night,’ the man answered, in a somewhat dogged and surly tone.

‘Probably so, very probably; but of course he cannot be expected to attend to you. Can’t you say what you want? You are one of Mr. Lang’s men, I think.’

‘I am, my lady,’ and a half-smile of no very pleasant meaning changed his countenance for an instant. ‘Well, as it seems I can’t get a hearing to-night, may be you’ll be pleased to tell the gentleman that Lynch wants a word with him badly. He’ll attend to me to-morrow, I’ll warrant.’

Touching his hat, he turned away. The lady rose, too, and did her best to watch him off the premises, for she had lived long enough among convicts, she said, not to trust them.

At the men’s huts, a short way from the house, the man Lynch lingered to light his pipe.

‘Got your ticket, Lynch?’ asked one man.

Lynch smiled bitterly. ‘Ask Lang,’ he said.

‘O, Lynch is going to marry; don’t you know that?’ another said, stretching himself on the ground as he spoke.

‘Ay, ay! Is that it? What, to pretty singing Nell, I suppose? And is she to work on the farm and draw double rations, or how?’

‘How?’ said Lynch, ‘how? Why, when I’ve got my ticket, I’ll need no double ration from any man. But there’s the pinch. Lang don’t fancy tickets!’

‘I’ve heard he’s a hard man,’ remarked the first speaker. ‘For me, I’ve a wife and four children over sea, and I want no more of that gear. As to a ticket, if I had one this minute, I’d get it made out for this district. You may go further and fare worse than Herbert for a master, I think. He’s a fair man.’

‘He is,’ returned Lynch, ‘and I want to have a word with him now. I suppose ’tis by Bengala Creek he’ll be coming?’

‘Ay, ay, no need to go round now, there aint a thimblefull of water there.’

‘Good evening,’ said Lynch ; ‘I’ll go round that way.’

Lynch crossed the paddock, climbed some slip-rails at the further end, and was soon in the thick bush, followed by a little white terrier with cut and disfigured ears, who snuffed at the hollow trees, and barked many threats at the opossums that were coming forth for their nightly revels. Lynch soon emerged into clearer ground where there were wheel-tracks, and the remains of a wooden bridge, which had once spanned a tolerably full stream of water. But the water was now dried up, and nothing remained but a few broken planks to speak of the once existing bridge. Horse and foot passengers could easily cross at the side in dry weather ; but after any rain there was a bog which forced them to take a much longer round to reach the little settlement of Bengala.

At this spot Lynch stopped ; he seated himself on an old stump of a tree, and crushing some gum leaves in his fingers, which caused them to emit a strong aromatic scent, he watched the path with a stern, dark expression. There was that in the countenance of the man which would have made most persons turn away ; yet his features were good, his figure powerful and well made, though the air with which his small cabbage-tree hat was pushed on one side, and his whole bearing, was almost reckless. The sun was getting low, and already the white fungi were beginning to glow on the fallen trees like gigantic glow-worms, casting a pale white light around them, when a sound of horse’s feet echoed round the bush, and Lynch started up. A gentleman on horseback soon appeared, going a fast trot. The horse shied at Lynch, which caused the rider to pull up.

‘ Beg pardon, sir,’ said Lynch, uncovering his head, and stepping nearer to him. ‘ No harm, sir.’

‘ O, Lynch, is it ? why, I thought it was one of those troublesome bushrangers. I hear they are out in this direction. Rascals ! I wish they may be taken !’

‘ Many a good fellow has been driven to that trade,’ replied the man. ‘ I took the liberty of calling to beg you, Mr. Herbert, to speak for me, sir.’

‘ In trouble again, Lynch ?’ said Mr. Herbert, putting his horse into a walk, and leaving room in the path for the man to keep alongside.

‘ The old story, sir, and something more. The fact is, Mr. Herbert—I’ve a fancy—I want to get married—and the girl’s willing. It would make another man of me, sir ; but he wont allow it, he’ll not answer for me, nor apply for leave ; he don’t want women and children, he says.’

‘ When will your ticket be due, Lynch ?’

‘ In three months if I go without punishment.’

‘ Why, you might have had it a year ago ?’

‘ Nearly two ; but I’d no character—no recommendation—only stripes ; but three months would do it.’

‘ Wait then. Get your ticket, and then marry.’

‘ That will be never, sir.’

‘ It depends on yourself.’

‘ It does *not*,’ said Lynch, with sudden energy. ‘ I’m a good workman ; Lang don’t want to lose me, but I’ll work no more ! I’ll disable myself before I’ll be so used again !’

‘ Well, I’m sorry for you, my good fellow ; but what I am to do in the business I don’t know. I spoke in your behalf once.’

‘ And I got forty down, of which I bear the marks this blessed minute ! Yes ! he was savage then ; but

it isn't to be got off anything now ; only to be married. It is hard I consider, after seven years' hard work ; four-and-thirty years of age. . . .'

'Come, come, my good fellow, you can hardly expect to be able to do all you please here, in the land of punishment. You were sent here for committing a crime.'

'And I paid the penalty ! I left a comfortable home, a farm as good as any in this colony. I left my mother and my sweetheart, who died of a decline for sorrow. I have worked—and after all, sir,' he added, in a softened tone, 'I wouldn't be so eager after it, but you see, sir, the girl ran away to my hut, three or four weeks ago, on account of hard usage at home. I took her in and kept her there, and treated her as if she had been a queen, sir ; but it's got about, and they talk lightly of her, and even the old father says the best thing she can do is to get married. She is a good girl, sir, as Miss Issy Lang knows, and fond of me, which aint p'raps altogether in her favour, as you may think.'

'Well, I will see Mr. Lang, and do what I can. In the meantime keep out of scrapes, and be civil and patient in your manner, my friend, as I have often advised you. Now, good evening !'

Mr. Herbert trotted on, and was soon out of sight. The convict retraced his steps for a few yards, and then took another turning which led to his master's property, on which he was an assigned servant.

A loud barking of many dogs, from a deep-toned hound to the stockman's yelping cur, greeted Mr. Herbert, the master of Warratah Brush, on his return to the farm, after a six months' absence at his station in New England, where the sanguinary attacks of the

aborigines on men and cattle kept every man as much as possible at his post. Telling the man to give his horse a good feed, and patting the dogs which pressed up to him, Mr. Herbert entered the verandah before mentioned, where his sister still sat, enjoying the cool evening. After the first greeting, she said, 'You are late, John !'

'Yes ; I was detained by one of Lang's men, or I should have been here before.'

'Ah ! he was here, an ill-looking fellow ! Pray, John, don't encourage him ; our men are well disposed, but a bad example is very catching, and . . . '

'Well, Mary, and what is the news?' interrupted the brother rather abruptly, as he sat down to the meal his sister had prepared for him.

'Hem ! you don't expect news, do you ? But by-the-bye, I think there is a little news, for a wonder ; a great deal has happened since you left us. There is a very nice person here, John ! She is governess at Langville—of course not in the least appreciated there ; they are worse than ever ;—poor thing, she is quite glad to come here, and have a little talk now and then. She is a ladylike person, and I am sure that she is shocked at Issy, and tired to death of Kate and her mother.'

'How does Mr. Farrant make way?' interrupted the brother.

'Oh, pretty well ! Of course he is a great favourite now, just at first ; and then he allows no faults in any one. But he will live to find them out. I told you in one of my letters that Issy was evidently setting her cap at him. . . . '

'And the new people?' said Mr. Herbert.

'The Veseys ! O, I know little of them. I have

not seen them except at church. Rather smart people, I believe. Mr. Budd, who of course knows all the news, says they have brought plenty of money.'

'They could not have come at a better time for investing it, then,' said the gentleman, leaning back, and looking very grave. 'The best sheep in the colony may be had at four shillings a-piece.'

Mr. Herbert presently said that he should go and take a turn about the place. Accordingly, first lighting his cigar, he sauntered out, the dogs rousing themselves from their drowsy attitudes to creep lazily behind him.

Crossing part of a bush-paddock—that is, a piece of the bush or forest ground enclosed, but not cleared—Mr. Herbert looked towards a stock-yard, then, apparently changing his mind, he turned towards a low fence, partly hedged by quince and lemon, and went into the garden.

Not a leaf or a twig was stirring, yet it was anything but 'still,' such a medley of sounds filled the air. Grasshoppers and frogs, mosquitos and curlews, mingled their chirping, buzzing, and wailing with the more distant howl of the dingos, or native dogs, while sharp-nosed opossums leapt from branch to branch. There was a feeling of intense heat and drought; a universal cry for moisture, if not rain, seemed to rise from each crackling leaf and blade.

Leaving the 'Master' to note the condition of his garden, about which he and his sister were more careful than was customary at that time in the colony (we are speaking of some twenty years ago), we will, to prevent confusion, give a short sketch of the district and those families with whom principally the story has to do.

A new colony grows apace, and civilization, when once fairly set in, progresses so rapidly, that the very face of the country is altered. But about twenty years ago, more or less, the district of which we speak retained very much of its natural grandeur and beauty, while slowly a few poor bark huts, used respectively for a forge, a wheelwright's hut, and a store, had clustered round a recently built church. These, with the school-house, formed the 'township' of Bengala. Warratah Brush, Mr. Herbert's farm, was adjoining, and, with its well-cleared paddocks, and rather tasteful and neat out-buildings, formed a great ornament to the place. Nine miles away was Langville, the 'great' house belonging to the 'great' man of the district.

Mr. Lang was a descendant of some Nottingham tradesman, who, failing at home, had carried the remains of his fortune to New South Wales, and, with a shrewd head and 'good times,' had gathered riches. The present Mr. Lang possessed flocks and herds, and many a goodly acre. He had built himself a stone mansion, and had been for some years the ruling spirit of the country for many miles round. He had a large family of girls and boys—the two elder girls just grown up.

Before the present church had been built, service was performed at Langville by a clergyman who lived as a settler on his own estate at least eighteen miles off. Mr. Lang felt somewhat aggrieved when the church was erected. It was so much pleasanter to have the service under his own roof, instead of driving nine miles of rough road. Sufficient names having been collected by a very active spirit, a rising man, called Budd, a clergyman was appointed to the district. A parsonage-house was also erected, principally owing to

the said Mr. Budd's unwearied energy in raising funds, for which he got heartily abused, but pleased himself by bringing the subject into notice when or wherever it was possible to do so. Mr. Herbert was descended from an old north country family, of late years impoverished, and transplanted to Bath ; where his father, the General, had died, leaving one son and one daughter, who having no other tie save a strong love for Bath and Bath society, determined to accompany her brother when he resolved to emigrate. As an army officer he was entitled to a grant of land, which, together with the remains of the Herbert fortune, enabled him to make a good beginning in the colony. But he was too speculative and too liberal for growing rich fast. He had theories, too, which did not exactly suit colonial politics. He was, perhaps, more respected and admired than liked ; and between him and Mr. Lang there was at once a cordial intercourse and constant misunderstanding.

Mr. Lang's wealth did not influence the Herberts as much as he thought it should ; while, on the other hand, all the higher points of the Herberts were utterly valueless in the eyes of the Langs. Between the gentlemen there were other sources of discord. Mr. Lang was, of course, a magistrate, and of course he had a great number of convicts as servants.

There were no police magistrates in those days.

If a prisoner offended he was summoned before a board of magistrates, composed of the neighbouring settlers. Therefore, if a master desired that forty lashes should be given, who was there to object ? 'Masters must support one another.'

Justice to the convict—the possibility of a master's

being in fault or being mistaken—was not much thought of.

When the life was too hard, punishment too frequent, the convict generally contrived to run away, and became a bushranger. This was their only means of escape. But Mr. Herbert considered that his duty as a magistrate, calling upon him to hear a cause and judge upon it, was separate from his position as a master of assigned servants. He was sometimes considered perverse and unneighbourly because he would insist on evidence and conviction before punishment. More than once had he 'got off' a prisoner, and was looked upon, in consequence, with suspicion and distrust, by Mr. Lang particularly.

The ladies of the two families, also, had their own separate and peculiar causes of mutual complaint. Miss Herbert thought Mrs. Lang dressed showily and vulgarly, and, with her old country notions, was annoyed at the pride of wealth and the many inconsistencies in the Langville establishment ; while Mrs. Lang patronisingly deplored 'poor dear Miss Herbert's old-fashioned appearance, and wondered what she and her brother found to be proud of, living in such a mean little place, and in such bad style !'

Yet with all this drawback, the intercourse between the two families was brisk, and a superficial observer might have taken them for even intimate friends.

Miss Herbert was many years older than her brother, and although she had begun to find the Bath society a very different thing as years crept on, and the place she had once occupied as a comely, fashionable young lady, was taken by others, and herself passed by—still at this distance she was wont to look back upon it with a halo

of fond regret. By constantly contrasting the past and the present, she really began to believe that she never had an annoyance or met with a stupid or undesirable person till she came to Australia. In the flattering haze of distance, each passing acquaintance was magnified into a friend. Those morning visits and evening parties, the shopping and bazaars, and all the busy bustle with which idle people contrive to surround themselves, once considered a 'bore,' were now keenly missed, and the defects and inconveniences of her present life, including her neighbour's faults, were magnified in proportion. She had come out full of theories that a primitive and free life was the best. Yet now she often felt keenly provoked that she had it not in her power to show the Langs what she called 'the proper thing.' Her brother was determined and consistent in his opposition to any attempt at fashion or show. He laughed at 'folly and humbug,' as he called it, and thoroughly enjoyed the freedom from restraint, and the sociability without show, which was the general custom of the country; though here and there a rich man might pretend to a little more 'style.'

They both despised the attempts and failures at Langville; and yet whenever an invitation came for them to go there, it was gladly accepted. Miss Herbert enjoyed the easy, softly cushioned chairs, the thick carpets lately arrived from England, the only ones in the district,—and all the luxuries which wealth afforded. She liked, too, to criticise the mistakes, and tried to set Mrs. Lang right in many ways. Mrs. Lang, on her side, while pretending to scorn or pity the Herberts' poverty, had a secret, restless desire for the approval of 'the Herberts.' She sought their ad-

vice in many indirect ways, and dreaded their criticism above all things. Were the real truth known, Miss Herbert's pride in her own good old family, and the value she set on birth, which was more apparent in her than in her brother, though perhaps not more deep, was the roc's egg to Langville, and caused a certain soreness and jealousy which would have been far worse but for one circumstance. Mr. Herbert professed himself one of those men who, seeing virtues and beauties in every young animal, from pigs and puppies to colts and calves, consider the young of their own race a mistake. Children of all ages were bores and pests, particularly in Australia, where they lived more among the family, and were not condemned, as a general rule, to imprisonment in the nursery. Yet, curiously enough, the very first visit he paid to Langville, he, then quite a young man, took a liking to the second girl of the family, which, while it surprised himself more than any one else, never lessened. He had been ushered into the drawing-room to await the coming of the lady of the house, and to his intense disgust, a whole set of children were drawn from their play in the verandah to watch him. They were not shy, and from taking observations at the window, they proceeded to approach nearer and stare; the eldest girl even ventured on speech, and asked him how many horses he kept?

This was a signal, and immediately one took up his whip, and another his hat, and three of the party, it must be allowed, behaved in a somewhat rude and noisy fashion. He let them alone, not daring to interfere, but, as he paced to and fro the room, to pass off his disgust, he observed that one who had hitherto kept aloof at the window, came forward and made strenuous efforts to bring her sister and brothers to

order. Something in her face struck him, and he listened to what she said in that earnest, loud whisper which children fancy is inaudible.

‘No! but, Kate, it is different! Come away, I tell you. This gentleman doesn’t like it a bit. Can’t you see? He doesn’t like us to be here—so come away!’ By dint of reiterating this to her sister—a girl much taller than herself—and applying a little compulsion to the younger boys, she cleared the room; then in a demure, half-womanly way, and yet with a look of amusement, she proceeded to close the window, saying, ‘If I shut this, they will not come in again to disturb you; you see, in general, people who come here always speak to us, but—’

‘Stop!’ he interrupted, ‘don’t close that! What are you doing?—Do come in and let me speak to you,’ he added, highly amused, and also struck by a certain likeness in her clear, frank eyes to some one he had known at home.

She came straight up to him, without any shyness, just looking back to see if the others followed, and was apparently relieved to find they had run down the lawn.

‘So, you think I ought to have spoken to you? You are right! Now then, how do you do, Miss Lang? I suppose you are called Lang?’

‘I am Issy Lang, papa’s second daughter; Kate is Miss Lang——.’ Then after a short pause, during which she seemed to be studying his face, ‘Are you the new gentleman come to live at Bengala?’

‘I am just come to the neighbourhood. My name is Herbert—John Herbert.’

‘I am glad of it. I like the name of John; but, I suppose I am not to call you so.’

‘Certainly, if you like, you may,’ he said, laughing.

‘I don’t know,’ she said, consideringly ; ‘I shall see what papa does.’ Another pause. ‘You don’t like children, do you ?’

‘I like you. But perhaps you do not call yourself a child ; perhaps you are a young lady ?’

‘I am twelve years old ; I don’t wish to be a young lady, because’

‘Because ?’

‘I don’t like being kept up in so much ceremony, and having to take care of my dress, and fiddle-faddle ! Papa says I needn’t be a young lady for a long time. Kate is already, and she likes it ; but I don’t. Do you ?’

‘Do I what ?’

‘I mean do you like young ladies better than children ?’

‘Well, I have always thought so ; but if you are a child, I shall change my mind. I should like to be friends with you. What do you say ?’

‘I don’t know . . . I am afraid—’ and she hesitated and blushed, while she still looked full and fearlessly at him. He felt much attracted by her ingenuous and simple manner. It was new to him, and that likeness also struck a chord which gave pleasure as well as pain.

‘Why are you afraid ?’ he said, stroking back her hair, even gently.

‘They say you are so proud,’ she half whispered ; ‘are you ?’

‘They do, do they ? Well, perhaps I may be. Every one is something ; but that need not hinder us from being good friends, need it ?’

‘No,’ she said, firmly, putting her hand in his. From

that hour a close friendship sprang up between them. And this notice of his favourite child—so flattering to Mr. Lang's paternal love and preference—caused him to overlook much which would otherwise have been less easily endured.

Mr. Herbert taught Isabel Lang to ride and to draw, and provoked his sister by his constant preference of her to her far prettier sister, Kate. Years passed with very little change in the district perceptible to the people themselves. But meanwhile the children were growing into young women and men, and Miss Herbert felt very uneasy, and wished her brother would remember the difference, and not 'get himself talked of.'

It became necessary at last for Mr. Herbert to go and stay for some time at his distant station, owing to the rising among the natives mentioned before.

He found it desirable to be there for many months. During his absence the new clergyman arrived, and there were also other changes. A long-deserted house, about equally distant from Langville and Warratah Brush, called Vine Lodge, had been bought, and repaired by some 'new comers,' reported to be of a more fashionable and wealthy class than common among emigrants. They were now living there, together with the lady's brother, who, however, only came for a time, it was said. Besides this, the Langs had been to Sydney, and the two girls had been regularly 'introduced' at the Sheriff's ball. They returned in such fashionable trim as to cause conversation in the district, and they were accompanied by a Miss Terry, a governess for the younger children. Hitherto the society had been for years confined to the Langs, the Herberts, the Budds, and the Jollys,

with the doctor and the officer commanding the company of mounted police stationed in the neighbourhood. These additions to the circle caused therefore no small stir and talk. It may as well be said here, that Mr. Herbert's return home had been somewhat hastened by a summons to attend a meeting, at which it was proposed to take into consideration the site for a new bridge and road, a subject on which the great men in the district differed, and which bid fair to be a bone of discord.

CHAPTER II.

NEIGHBOURS.

‘**T**HE church will be pretty full to-day, any how,’ said a curly-headed boy to his companion; ‘we’ll soon want another if the district improves at this rate. Come, Dick, you take the bell, for I’m fairly tired;’ and accordingly the two school-boys relieved guard at the bell, which was hung outside a small slab building, and jingled in an unharmonious way.

The graves scattered around proclaimed that this was the church or place of worship for the district. The public road passed in front, and all round was thick bush or forest, save a few flat paddocks belonging to a neighbouring farm. Had it been more cleared, and the unvarying outline of gum-trees a little broken, it might have been pronounced a pretty spot. Here and there was a single graceful shrub, many a delicate blossom, and that peculiar depth of blue sky which inspires the eye with a sense of space. It would have been a pleasant scene, but for the brown and sun-dried grass, and that dull bluish hue, a peculiar feature in Australian foliage, which lessens the beauty to English eyes.

Mr. Herbert stood leaning against the fence, beating the grasshoppers down with his cane, as they swarmed round him, then shifting his straw hat, he turned and

looked absently down the road, at the people coming to church. There were working men in white trousers and blue shirts, some distinguished by the addition of a jacket or smart neckerchief, and all with cabbage-tree hats. There were but few women in proportion ; either the distance was too great, or the heat too oppressive, or they could not leave their young families. Then came a gig, driven by a remarkably thin, lanky man, and by him was seated a plump, showily-dressed little woman, his wife. Their boys, three in number, galloped before on their ponies.

‘How are ye, Herbert? I was afraid we were late,’ said Mr. Budd, as he guided his horse through the gate ; ‘but I see the Langs are not here yet.’ Mr. Herbert gave a distant bow to this address, which was spoken in a nasal, shrill tone of voice, but answered not a word.

‘Oh, here they are, Mr. B. !’ said the lady, disentangling her dress from the gig-step ‘Here they are, the phaeton, the gig, and all the horses ! My ! what a number ! and there’s the new comers, I declare, in a spring cart. Well ! I thought they were a cut above that, I must say !’

Mrs. Budd smoothed her dress, and exchanged her gloves for a newer pair.

‘Come on, come on,’ said her husband, ‘before the row begins. What a stiff fellow that Herbert is, to be sure ! Considering what I am, I should think he might vouchsafe a word ; he, with his small farm, and never doing anything for the good of the district ! And here am I taking upon myself all the responsibility and trouble, and am ready to put down my 50*l.* or 100*l.* in a minute !’ Mr. Budd’s voice was stopped by his wife.

‘My! do look now, Mr. B., look at Mrs. Lang, and the Miss Langs! How smart, I declare! and then there’s that Mrs. Vesey, in sleeves just like a man’s coat—new fashion, I suppose—and who’s that tall fellow?’

‘Oh, that’s Fitz, Mrs. Vesey’s brother—has some capital dogs, I hear. Perhaps we might come to a bargain. I’ll have out our old gig, and do it up. I’ll put a low enough price upon it. A little cash, and a couple of those hounds . . .’

‘Dogs again! Mr. B., don’t, pray, be getting any more dogs! There are fifty on the farm already, if there’s one!’

Here the husband and wife entered the church, and took their seats, while the parties just arrived were greeting each other at the gate.

‘Here we are,’ said Mr. Lang, with a laugh, ‘safe and sound at last; but ’pon my honour, Herbert, you should get a couple of your men to mend that bridge; we were over as near as could be!’

‘The bridge? Why! it doesn’t belong to me,’ returned Mr. Herbert, drily. ‘Though near our paddock, we seldom or never use it; we always cut across the flat, and avoid it. You and Mr. Budd must see to it.’

‘Budd! Oh yes, to be sure, very true, it will give him an excuse to be busy. He certainly ought to do it; very true, his wool-drays always pass that way. Yes, to be sure, I’ll give him a hint.’

‘Better send one of your own men, papa; it would be done in a day,’ said Isabel Lang, who now joined them. Mr. Herbert smiled and bowed, but she put out her hand, and said, ‘How d’ye do?’ in so hearty and frank a manner, that the gravity and distance vanished, and they were soon chatting freely, while the rest of the Lang party collected.

‘And how is Miss Herbert?’

‘Quite well ; she is as usual busy in the school.’

‘Very good and indefatigable, I am sure, sir,’ remarked Mrs. Lang, after a curtsy to Mr. Herbert. ‘Single ladies have the advantage over us, that they have so much spare time,’ she added, in a patronising tone.

The gentleman again bowed coldly, and drew back a little for the party to pass. On they went,—Mr. Lang and his second daughter Isabel, then Mrs. Lang, all flounces and feathers, her satin dress brushing the ground, and Miss Lang, a pretty, fashionable-looking girl. Near her walked the stranger, about whom Mrs. Budd had asked—a gentleman-like figure, and, if not regularly handsome, with an attractive face. Then came two little girls and their governess, the latter chiefly remarkable for her quiet, plain dress ; Mr. and Mrs. Vesey, and Captain Smith, the officer in charge of the mounted police stationed in the neighbourhood followed ; and the last, though certainly not least in stature, walked Mr. Herbert, his lip half curling, though it gradually relaxed as he walked up the little building, and seated himself in a corner of one of the wooden benches. As the service proceeded, another party was added to the congregation. A dozen or more blacks might be seen looking through the open door ; some staring curiously round, and others listening to the preacher open-mouthed. The sermon was one to create interest in all, from different reasons. Its object was to call on them to build a church more fitted for Divine worship than the present building. It was curious to see Mr. Budd’s deportment, now bending his sharp grey eyes on the clergyman with a self-satisfied expression, and now looking at one, and then another of the congregation,

as much as to say, 'That's for you?' Mr. Lang raised his eyebrows every now and then, as if in wonder, and then fell to blowing his nose. Mr. Herbert, neither moving head nor foot, leant back in his seat, listening with grave attention. Mr. Farrant had not long been their clergyman, and the style of his sermon, as well as many other things about him, were very new to the district.

When the service was over, and they were once more in the churchyard, waiting for their carriages, Mr. Herbert was stopped by Mr. Budd, who, drawing him aside, began a long story about what he had done with regard to building the new parsonage, and how he was ready now with time and money to commence another church. Mr. Herbert looked impatient, and at last abruptly broke from him, following the others, who were apparently bending their steps across the paddock, instead of getting into their carriages. The Langs' house, Langville, being so far from church, they often stayed and had lunch at Warratah Brush before they returned home.

'Well, Mr. Herbert, do you see what a party we are, and going to besiege you as usual?' said Isabel, as he overtook her.

'Well,' said he, 'but it won't last long! When the other church is built, we shall see you no more, I suppose.'

'No more of those odious Langs, then, for you and Miss Herbert!' said she, laughing, and half-mimicking Miss Herbert's manner. 'Papa can't forgive Mr. Budd at all. He would not have come here to-day had it not been for Mr. Farrant.'

Mr. Herbert made no answer, but swung his cane round and round; perhaps he wondered if Isabel had

really ever overheard his sister's comments on the Langville Sunday visits.

'What do you think of our new neighbours, Mr. Herbert?' said Isabel.

'I have hardly seen them yet. I always look at old friends first, and I find two young ladies of my acquaintance so—so—what shall I call it?—so come out, that I've had no eyes for anything else.'

'It is only because you have been so long in the bush that civilized society seems strange to you, I dare say. I don't think I can return the compliment, however. Some people of my acquaintance have drawn in instead of coming out! A whole week returned, and not the good manners to call!'

Here Mr. Lang looked back, and called out, 'Issy, my darling, where did you put the letters?'

'Tom has them, papa.'

'No he, hasn't; he told me you had them.'

'I only know I told him they were in the driving-box, papa. Run, Willie, do, and see if they are not there.'

But Willie did not hear; on the contrary, he quickened his pace in the other direction, and was soon out of sight.

'I'll run back,' said Mr. Herbert.

'Oh no, pray!' said Isabel. But he was off.

'Ah, let him go, 'twill take the starch out of him on such a day as this,' said Mr. Lang, shifting his hat, and putting his hand on his daughter Isabel's shoulder. Then laughing, and saying that she made a capital walking-stick, he turned round and asked Mrs. Vesey if she did not think it must be a hard matter to find such a tribe in shoe leather in these pinching times?

Miss Herbert produced biscuits and grapes, bread and butter, colonial wine, and lemon syrup for her

guests. Mrs. Vesey was loud in her praises of everything, and swept about the little room with an easy confidence, which contrasted curiously enough with Mrs. Lang's stiff attempts at dignity. Mrs. Vesey patted the dogs, whistled to the parrots, examined all the little contrivances, and between times joined Mrs. Lang in quizzing Mr. and Mrs. Budd.

'They are deliciously absurd,' said she; 'his musical voice would make his fortune in the puppet-show of Punch and Judy. I shall cultivate their acquaintance assiduously.'

'Well, I confess I don't see anything to like in them,' said Mrs. Lang, understanding the lively Mrs. Vesey literally. 'Mrs. Budd is thought to dress well, I know, but it is not after my taste, I confess.'

'Voice, madam!' exclaimed Mr. Lang, 'if anything could set my teeth on edge in the world it would be that detestable fellow's voice! Could you but hear him at a public meeting—heart and senses!—you'd never care to listen to his burr-r again!'

'What is that building with a long chimney?' asked Mrs. Vesey, looking through her glass.

'That is a mill,' said Mr. Herbert.

'How many bushels did ye grind last week, Herbert?' asked Mr. Lang, with a half laugh, and winking hard at Mrs. Lang.

'It was out of repair,' was the answer.

'Ay, ay, so I thought. Give me old brown Ben instead of your long chimneys and smoke,' said Mr. Lang, taking up a book.

'And does "brown Ben" never get lame?' drily remarked Mr. Herbert.

'And what if he does? Put in another—no want of horse-flesh here.'

'Great waste of it, and great waste of labour, in my opinion,' said Mr. Herbert. 'Why, I can show you on my books what the steam-mill does.' And he rose and went out of the room.

'Books ! books !' said Mr. Lang, 'send them to Jericho. I never go by books ; I go by old experience, and I know what a horse-mill is, and I know that—'

'Are they talking of the mill ?' asked Miss Herbert, who was a little deaf, of Mrs. Lang. 'It is such a convenience !—but John has laid out a great deal on it.'

'Indeed,' said Mrs. Lang ; 'I should have thought Mr. Herbert knew better, in these times !'

When Mr. Herbert reappeared with his books, which contained a farm journal, Isabel remarked that it was quite time to go.

'I must just prove the fact,' said Mr. Herbert, and he read out a statement of the mill work.

'I don't care a farthing, sir, for all the statements in the world !—they are not worth this,' said Mr. Lang, snapping his fingers. 'They don't convince me, Mr. Herbert.'

'It would be a hard matter to do that, I own,' said Mr. Herbert, with a look of contempt.

Mrs. Lang laughed affectedly, and, rising from her chair, said the carriage was come, and so they had better leave the discussions of mills for another day.

The party took their respective places in the phaeton, gig, spring cart, or saddle-horses, and left Warratah Brush and Miss Herbert to 'peace and quietness,' as that lady observed when they drove off.

Warratah Brush was a pretty specimen of the generality of colonial cottages, such as they were before people began to build those comfortable stone houses which are now becoming so numerous. It

consisted of four rooms on the ground floor, leading into each other without any passage. At the end of the deep verandah there were two small closets boarded in, which went by the name of 'verandah rooms;' one was used as a spare bedroom for travellers, the other for a kind of pantry or store. The beautiful Moreton Bay bignonia, with its clusters of pink blossom, and the passion-flower completely covered the roof and verandah, and was trained into arches, though here and there a long wreath escaped from its confinement, and waved to and fro in the evening breeze, which had now set in. In front was a small garden, consisting of a few beds, with narrow paths between, gay with roses and geraniums. A slight shade was afforded by a group of white cedar trees, already full of their yellow berries. The garden was surrounded by a low fence, which divided it from the farm-yard. Opposite rose a goodly barn, which towered far above the low and steep-roofed cottage, and a little to the left was a stock-yard and a fowl-house, all in good repair and in sight of the house. Behind stood the kitchen and wash-house.

Two large kangaroo dogs lay outside the gate which opened into the verandah, and within stood a row of cages containing different parrots.

'Well,' said Miss Herbert, as she sat in the verandah, and fanned herself with a newspaper, 'it is over till next week, at any rate! I am sure I wish our house was ten miles off from the church, and then we should not have our rooms so filled, and my temper ruffled, every Sunday by those Langs!'

'So that was the Mrs. Vesey?' said her brother.

'Yes; I don't know what to make of them; they are stylish-looking people—evidently gentlefolks. But

I don't like their being so very intimate at Langville already. Mrs. Vesey and Isabel seemed to have a great many jokes together, which no one else could hear and you know I hate jokes !

'My dear, I assure you everybody could hear but yourself.'

'You are quite mistaken, John ; I saw it all ; indeed, I believe they were quizzing me—or the room.'

'Nonsense ; it was Mr. Budd. However, I agree with you about the heat of the room. Really it is too small ! I saw such a good site for a house the other day, Mary, behind the Creek. I should like to build there.'

'Surely you will not be so absurd as to build a Herbertville, just because there is a Langville, John ? Pray lay out no more money here ! Try and save enough to go home.' She sighed as she pronounced the last word.

'Home !' said her brother. 'This must be our home. There is not a chance of our ever returning. I don't know even that I wish it. Ten years make a fearful gap, and we should neither of us like the climate of England now, or the habits.'

'O John, John ! as if the very sight of a face fresh from the old country does not set one longing for England ! I hate this place ; we are buried in the bush, losing money, and having no one to associate with. It is all very well for you ; a man finds occupation—but for a lady'

'Why, what do you call all those people who were here just now ? Ours is quite a gay district ! By-the-by, Mary, I thought the girls, the Langs I mean, a good deal got on ; what has smartened them up so ?'

'O, they are "come out" now, and they have been staying in Sydney, as I told you, and I dare say paid

the milliner a few visits. Kate is certainly a pretty girl—very pretty—and with the fortune she will have, will be sought after, no doubt. I suspect she was much admired in Sydney. They say she was the belle of the room at the Sheriff's ball, and Mr. Fitz paid her great attention. Poor Tom Jolly, I feel for him very much !

'Isabel looks well, too,' said Mr. Herbert ; ' she is quite come out since I went away. One forgets how time passes ; she is fast growing into womanhood.'

' Ah, you know,' said Miss Herbert, drawing in her breath in a way peculiar to herself when not quite pleased, ' we never agree about her ; I can't admire her at all, she is so freckled !'

' So fair, you mean,' put in Mr. Herbert.

' Handsome eyes, certainly,' Miss Herbert continued, with an air of consideration and concession.

' Beaming,' interrupted her brother.

' But such a nose ! A regular " turn up."'

' Nez retroussé. Elle est piquante et spirituelle.'

' And her mouth is too wide, or is it that she is always laughing ?'

' 'Tis a sweet smile, so full of human love, as some poet says.'

' In fact,'—Miss Herbert went on, not noticing her brother's interruptions, ' it is lucky that she is, if anything, rather under-sized, for if she were as tall as her sister, she would be masculine indeed.'

' As it is, she rejoices in a well-knit, compact figure, active and lithe, and frolicsome as a kitten.'

' Pooh, John,' remarked his sister, who had only heard his last words, ' you will tip your chair over in a moment ! What a trick you have of balancing it so, and looking up into the sky, uttering paradoxes.'

' Prove that ! Prove that I have uttered one paradox.'

‘ You have uttered an absurdity. In the first place, she is not at all like a kitten, and in the second, if she is, it is no merit, as you seem to assume. Young ladies should not mimic kittens. Your encouragement of Isabel Lang’s faults is very wrong in you, John ! You ought to know better.’

‘ My dear Miss Herbert ! I !—I encourage her faults !—when I am for ever criticising and finding fault ! Any other girl but herself would hate me.’

‘ You do encourage her by making a joke of it. She is too confident, too self-sufficient as it is ;—too fond of quizzing and joking, and too forward. I am sure she and Mrs. Vesey were laughing at my old-fashioned dress.’

‘ My dear, indeed. . . .’

‘ My dear John, don’t contradict me ! I can’t hear, perhaps, as well as others, but I can see. Believe me, my eyes are particularly good, and I *did* see ; so don’t make the matter worse by smoothing it over. Of course I don’t care a farthing—I can’t be expected to dress so well, or to know the fashions exactly as the Miss Langs or Mrs. Vesey, but still . . .’

Here the servant came to ask if they were ready for dinner.

‘ Yes, make some tea, Jane ; here, take the key and fill the canister from the chest. Come, John, before the beef grows cold.’

Mr. Herbert, however, remained to read a letter. Its contents seemed not very pleasing. He frowned, and gave a low whistle, at which one of the dogs jumped over the gate.

‘ Pshaw, Forrester, I don’t want you ; go back, sir !’

The animal drooped his head and wagging his tail in token of submission mingled with disappointment,

lay down on the mat within the gate, looking up every now and then at his master, who, after again reading the letter, joined his sister at dinner.

‘Have you anything to give Mr. Farrant, Mary?’ said her brother. ‘I think he will call on his way back; he half promised to do so.’

‘Dear me, then, I must contrive something. He will be so tired and weary, poor man, after such a hot ride.’

Miss Herbert hurried over her dinner in order to prepare some little favourite delicacy for the clergyman. There was much searching in cupboards and consulting with the maid, though Mr. Herbert often said ‘Pshaw,’ and assured her that an egg and some cold meat would be quite enough.

But visitors had been scarce of late at Warratah, and Miss Herbert liked the pleasure of preparation on a small scale; and, moreover, as it was the first meal the clergyman had taken in her house, she determined to have it properly arranged, and some handsome old silver, with the Herbert crest on it, was somewhat proudly taken out. She did not generally use it, being too much afraid of bushrangers, but she thought she should like to show Mr. Farrant that *some* of his parishioners had this very important certificate of belonging to an old family!

‘Ah, it looks like home!’ sighed she, as she placed the massive spoons and forks on the table. ‘Well! how things are changed, to be sure!’

‘Female vanity!’ muttered Mr. Herbert, with a slight toss of his head, while a little of the said vanity might have been seen lurking about the regions of his own mouth, had it not been more than half hidden by his moustachios.

‘I shall leave you to your hospitable cares, and try

and meet Farrant,' and lighting his cigar he went out, followed by the dogs.

The bush was in an uproar from the noisy birds called familiarly 'old soldiers,' as they fluttered about in busy restlessness before going to roost. Then a wild shrieking laugh rang through the forest, and the large-headed bird, the laughing jackass, flew heavily from one white gum to another. Gay parrots chattered their 'good nights,' while magpies interchanged plaintive adieus.

A tempting seat on a fallen tree induced Mr. Herbert to rest and give himself up to the listless, dreamy influences of the evening, unfreshened as it was by any breeze, and only cooler than it had been all day from the absence of the burning sun.

The return of the clergyman, however, soon interrupted his dreams. Mr. Herbert had met Mr. Farrant before he went to his station, but had not seen much of him. He had not felt quite sure whether he should like him or not. Mr. Farrant was essentially fitted to be a popular man, and likely to be so. Every one praised him, and this caused Mr. Herbert to look with something like distrust on him. At first he had met him with cold hauteur, fully determined not to be in a hurry in forming an intimacy. Mr. Farrant's manner, charming as it was to others, did not quite please Mr. Herbert; but having heard of a very disinterested action done by Mr. Farrant, and the sermon of that morning having proved that he could speak stern truth in a grave manner, as well as win ladies' hearts by talking of poultry and bees, and having a pleasant word for every one, high, low, rich, or poor,—Mr. Herbert was now bent on showing his readiness to come forward to him. Perhaps there was a little com-

placency in the thought that Mr. Farrant might find him a more congenial companion than any other person in the district—a slight feeling of pride and satisfaction in the idea that though longer, perhaps, in granting his friendship and regard, it would be found as well worth having as others !

In fact, the sister with her cookery, old family plate, and such things, was not more anxious to please than the brother. He ‘unbent’ this evening, and gave himself up to conversation in a way in which few could excel him when he chose. Mr. Farrant was pleased ; the weariness he had felt from hard duty in the fervent heat of the day passed away. They adjourned to the verandah, Miss Herbert’s ‘withdrawing-room,’ as she called it, and there was much to say and much to hear. Mr. Farrant could talk of the old country, and found interested listeners. Improvements, new books, and music were canvassed, and then Mr. Farrant touched on his desire to have something like good singing in the church. Miss Herbert shook her head at his idea of some of the ladies undertaking it ; she thought no one had any taste for music or anything like a voice in the district. Her brother thought her hypercritical ; he was sure the Langs had good natural ears, though uncultivated, and Mr. Farrant smiled as he asked if they had heard Mr. Lang’s governess sing ?

‘No,’ Miss Herbert said. ‘But she was much prepossessed with her appearance ; such a contrast as it was to the Miss Langs !’

Mr. Herbert remarked, with the slightest possible tone of depreciation, that she was a very *little* person, and he had not noticed her face. Then came a pause, which Mr. Farrant broke by speaking of his enjoyment

of the rides—the beautiful ‘flats,’ which seemed made for a gallop! He seemed pleased with everything. The climate was delightful, the independence of the life charming.

‘And the people?’ asked Miss Herbert.

‘Full of kindness and hospitality; thoroughly well meaning,’ said Mr. Farrant.

This led to a long discussion. Miss Herbert spoke of individuals, and compared them with old acquaintance in Bath. Mr. Herbert spoke of the colony in general, and dwelt on the evil the convict system had been to society. He alluded impatiently to the faults and grievances, and in the tone of a somewhat disappointed theorist. Prizing the freedom of life, and dwelling with eloquence on its many picturesque points, yet evidently deeming a man of education like himself thrown away; wondering how any person could be foolish enough to break through old associations and home ties, and exile himself to such a barren land, yet—owning that habit had reconciled him to the evils; and though for the first five years, finding his money-tree did not bear the promised fruit, he had over and over again resolved to return to England—he now felt that this was his home. The climate alone was an inducement, and late accounts from England did not tend to make him desire to be there.

Mr. Farrant listened, but did not agree. He, too, had felt the transplanting. He confessed it was a sad wrench; but instead of being disappointed, he had found everything better than he expected. He had excuses for all, and dwelt with evident pleasure on the kindness with which he had been received.

‘You go very often to Langville, I believe?’ said Miss Herbert.

‘Yes, I do. Really they are so kind. They are delightful girls.’

‘Kate is very pretty, certainly,’ remarked Mr. Herbert, stooping as he spoke to stroke a cockatoo.

‘Very pretty; but not to be compared to her sister, I think. Miss Isabel Lang is——’

‘O dear! O dear! Surely you cannot call her pretty!’ said Miss Herbert, with an almost ludicrous expression of concern.

‘I do. What do you say, Mr. Herbert?’

‘That you have chosen quite a wrong word. But here comes old Forrester to claim his share of attention. Come, Mr. Farrant, if you are anything of a dog-fancier, you must confess this to be a noble fellow;’ and Mr. Herbert expatiated on his merits and points as men are apt to do of a favoured animal.

It was time to break up the party, and Mr. Farrant with reluctance mounted his horse, promising to repeat the visit very soon.

‘A very agreeable young man,’ remarked Miss Herbert, as their guest trotted off.

‘Yes, a pleasant, gentlemanly man—an acquisition—certainly an acquisition,’ returned her brother.

‘Well, I do hope he wont be falling in love with Issy; I fancied he looked rather conscious when speaking of her.’

‘A true woman’s fancy. Now that the girls have appeared at the balls in Sydney, I suppose every one who speaks to them must be a lover. I thought one might expect a freedom from such folly in the Bush. Depend upon it, Mary, Mr. Farrant has no such thought at present.’

‘Ah, well! we shall see,’ said Miss Herbert, with a very positive nod of the head.

‘ I shall ride to Langville for breakfast to-morrow ; I have some business to talk over with Lang, and I will make my observations and report them for your benefit,’ remarked Mr. Herbert, carelessly, as he moved away from the verandah into the yard, in a somewhat lounging fashion.

CHAPTER III.

LANGVILLE.

LANGVILLE was a new stone house, with a handsome suite of sitting rooms, and every other convenience, including a wide verandah round three sides of the building. The original dwelling was still left standing, half buried in creepers, and was now used for a school-room and spare bedrooms. From the drawing-room windows were seen the farm buildings, forming quite a little village of huts, with a horse-mill, a forge, and a wheelwright's shed, the overseer's cottage, extensive fowl-houses, a good water-hole and stock-yard, all of which Mr. Lang was justly proud of. The road leading up to the house was worse than even the usual average of colonial roads, full of holes and stumps, and Mr. Herbert never failed to remark on this inconsistency every time he went there.

'Your road is not improved,' said he to the Miss Langs, as he gave his horse to the servant.

'Quite good enough,' said Isabel; 'a friend is not worth having who fears to encounter a rough road: you must confess there is a beautiful view. I don't believe you have seen anything so pretty in your journey as those hills.'

She pointed to where the morning mist was clearing away from the distant country, and range beyond

range looked deeply blue. Then laughing, she said it was all envy that made Mr. Herbert find fault.

‘That view is very fine, certainly,’ said Mr. Herbert; ‘but look there;’ he pointed to the bush at the side of the house, a forest of dead trees, looking like grim ghosts—tall, straight, and white. They had been ‘barked’—that is, killed by cutting away lines of bark, and when dry and dead enough, they were to be set fire to, a short way of clearing ground when labour is scarce.

‘That is enough to spoil any view,’ said Mr. Herbert; ‘but have you been industrious at sketching since I left? Come, where are your views of Darling harbour, and the north shore?’ said he to Isabel.

‘I have none. I have been busy reading lately. I really have not touched a pencil since you left——’

‘What have you been reading? have you subscribed to the library in Sydney?’

‘No; but I have been reading, and reading grave books, too. What do you say to this, and this,’ said she, as they entered the sitting-room, and she pointed to some books on the table.

Mr. Herbert opened them, turned over the leaves, and then looked at the title-page, but said nothing.

‘Ah, Mr. Herbert! very kind of you, I am sure, to come so soon. Wont you step into the other room,’ said Mrs. Lang, who now came in. ‘Looking at the books? you always are fond of books, and so is Issy, I assure you. Mr. Farrant is kind enough to supply her. A very pice young man that is. Issy, my dear, you should cover those books, they are so well bound.’

‘Yes, mamma,’ Isabel answered, while it was evident from the sparkle of fun which rippled all over

her face as she glanced at Mr. Herbert, that some joke was coming.

'Well? What is it? Speak out Issy,' he said, coming to her side, though there was a little suppressed irritation or annoyance in his manner.

'Oh, nothing! Only what did that elongation of the lip mean, just now? Are not the books good and desirable?'

'Good, and desirable, so far as I know. I don't profess to have read all. But of course, of course——' his words rolled out more rapidly, and the head went up with great effect.

'Of course, the clergyman of the parish is, or should be, the best judge of that,' she put in promptly, and looking again very demure and as amiable as possible.

'Oh!' said Kate. 'Mr. Herbert, you have yet to learn what an authority this is come to be. Issy swears by Mr. Farrant in everything.'

To his quick and keen look of question at these words, Isabel answered, without raising her eyes, 'It is my character. I must obey some one, and I have been so strictly drilled into following advice, that—that, while one adviser was so busy counting fleeces, I was forced to hang myself on to another. At all events, a legitimate one, isn't he, Mr. Herbert?'

'Legitimate! Of course you are free to do as you like. Reading is, as I have often told you, very desirable. I should say indispensable for a gentlewoman. But, if my memory holds right, you never cared much for it.'

'I am learning now! I feel a very keen desire for knowledge. You see, an introduction to the great world, meeting all the élite in Sydney, shamed my ignorance. I longed to hide myself. Directly I came

home I set myself to learn, and remembered your own words.'

There was something indescribable in the manner and look, as she said this. The comic affectation of a primness, not naturally hers, and yet under all the joke and fun, a touch of heart in her eyes, as she glanced at him, as if to say, 'don't be angry with me.'

He never could resist her when in this mood, and coming quite close to her now, and looking her straight in the face, he said—

'You remembered my words? Well, Issy, for that—in that you did think of an old friend in his forced absence, and were not wholly taken up with new admirers, I shall strive to forget certain reports I have heard. Give me your hand, child. Is it as it was? I mean, no one has come between and cast me into outer darkness?'

'Indeed, no! No!' she said heartily, and giving him her hand, which he clasped between both his own, and finally, not letting it go, he drew it on his arm; when they were summoned to breakfast.

'But these reports?' he began, as they went in after the others.

'About failures, bankruptcies, and so on?' she asked saucily.

'No; I speak of reports nearer home, about you, and this district. Did you like your gaiety in Sydney?'

'Pretty well. It was pleasant to see Kate so admired, though, to be sure, I did get sleepy and tired of sitting out, and being so silent.'

'Why silent?'

'Because I had no one to speak to! Kate was sought by every one, but I, poor I, had to look on, and *behave 'pretty.'*'

'Ah! you don't mean that you were overlooked, that you received no attention?'

'Very little. But it didn't break my heart, as you see.'

'It is not what I heard. My information was quite different. I expected to find you 'set up,' and too proud to speak to me. I was so impatient at being detained up yonder! Really I was uneasy as to what change was coming to the wild little girl I left here.'

'Afraid lest your office should be taken from you?'

'What office?'

'I mean of critic, fault-finder, advice-giver.'

'To whom?'

'Oh, as if you didn't know! As if I didn't feel very like a fish out of water, when I had not you to give me weighty and grave advice!'

'Can I do nothing but advise and find fault? If so, you can't be very rejoiced at my return!'

'And who said I was?'

'You are not, then?'

'Now, don't be disagreeable, Mr. Herbert! Don't begin quarrelling just yet. I am hungry, and here is breakfast ready.'

Mr. Lang, followed by his two boys, joined them presently. 'Sorry to be late, but I was detained. We've put Venn into the store, and I had to give him a few instructions.'

'Venn! what is he promoted for?' said Mr. Herbert.

'Why, he's a clever chap, sharp as a needle, and if I make it his interest to serve me, I shall reap the benefit. There's not a cleverer fellow among my men.'

'Nor one with a worse character,' observed Mr. Herbert, gravely.

'I can't say much for his morality, certainly,' said

Mr. Lang ; 'but that's nothing to me. He is assigned to me, and I must make the best of him. He has been very sharp about my stray cattle, so I wish to reward him. He knows he can't cheat me in the store.'

'But will every one else,' Mr. Herbert said, somewhat sotto voce ; then louder, he added—'You don't mean to say you have put such a man over the others ? Why, it is offering a premium to vice. Such a person ought to be discouraged in every way, instead of being rewarded.'

'Oh, I leave that to Mr. Farrant, it is not my business, and I should like to see if any man here would do otherwise. If I choose to patronize a clever man, although he is a convict, I should like to know who is to prevent me.'

Mr. Herbert made no answer, but eat his breakfast in silence. Mr. Lang was ruffled, and found fault with the coffee and the toast.

'Where are the little ones, and where's Miss Terry ?' he asked.

'They are in the school-room. Mr. Lang,' said his wife. 'It is more convenient for them to breakfast there, and they can begin their studies so much sooner.'

'Studies indeed ! let them learn to boil coffee ! I take it that is a far more creditable and more useful thing to know than 'studies !' Isn't it so, Mr. Herbert ? A man wants a wife who can give him a comfortable meal, and I assure you, when I first married, and when we lived in that little cottage, Mrs. Lang made better coffee than I ever get now-a-days ; the kitchen was close by, and she boiled it herself.'

'Well, papa, I can assure you mamma made this herself, and it is your fault for staying so long that it is cold,' said Isabel. 'But I will get some hot for you.'

'I beg pardon, Mrs. Lang. No offence, I hope?' said Mr. Lang, recovering his good humour. 'I am sure I didn't know you had been so notable of late.'

Before the breakfast party was dispersed, Mr. Farrant was announced. He came to beg Mr. Lang to ride with him, and settle the site for a school-house, and the three gentlemen went off together. In the mean time the ladies were discussing a proposed pic-nic.

'We must ask the Budds, because they asked us, you know,' said Mrs. Lang, counting the number of heads on her fingers. 'And they will bring some of their children, they always do—so say four there.'

'And the Jollys of course,' said Isabel.

'And three from Vine Lodge,' said Kate.

'Yes, my dear, and Captain Smith, and Mr. Farrant, and Dr. Marsh, and that's all, I believe,' said the mother.

'You've forgotten the Herberts,' said Isabel.

'Mr. Herbert is so grave, he is worse than ever; I can't bear him,' said Kate.

'Nor I either,' said Mr. Lang, who came in at the window. 'And what's more, I won't pay any civility to a man who sets up for a model. He had better be appointed governor here; he is full of new-fangled notions.'

'He rides a good horse, at any rate,' remarked Willie, a boy of fifteen.

'I don't see that it is so very good, for my part, considering he keeps a man always rubbing him. Don't judge horses by a shining coat, my boy!'

Mr. Lang went away, and his wife ran after him to ask a question.

'This wont do,' said Isabel to her sister; 'it will never do to leave out the Herberts; I must go after papa.'

'O, why trouble yourself about it? That is the way with you, Issy, and you never leave papa alone about Venn. Why not let people take their own way? it is nothing to you.'

'Nothing to me! it is a great deal to me what my father does, and he is only irritated just for the moment. He will, I know, see that it is right to invite the Herberts, and as to Venn, don't talk of it! To think of that man being our store-keeper, an upperservant, when we know what he is!'

In the course of the day Isabel joined her father in a walk to one of his fields, and contrived to introduce the subject of the pic-nic, and urged the necessity of asking their old friends at Warratah Brush. She found, however, that it was a task of more difficulty than she had anticipated. The subject of the new bridge had been started during the morning, and Mr. Herbert had entirely disagreed with Mr. Lang about it. Mr. Lang was particularly sore at being opposed in anything he had in view, and was very angry with both Mr. Herbert and Mr. Farrant.

But Isabel was a favourite, and as she leant on his arm and talked, his angry mood passed away. He pointed to his crop of green barley with pleasure, and showed her where he meant to clear away the bush and make a vineyard. They mounted the hill, which commanded a view of the greatest part of the cultivated land, and on all sides almost as far as they could see it was Langville property. The new and *pretty house* just showed its white chimney-tops, the

blacksmith's hammer was heard in the distance, and nearer at hand a sheep-bell told them that one of the numerous flocks was not far off.

'Yes,' said Mr. Lang, 'tis a nice spot, and it is a little improved since we came here. 'Twas thick forest then, and we lived in a slab cottage. Ah! there goes a wanga wanga pigeon, your mother would like some of those for dinner. I must send out the boys with the gun.

The pleasant walk had its full effect on Mr. Lang, and his daughter gained her point.

'Well, then, we may ask the Herberts, papa?' said she, as she separated from him at the door.

'Aye, aye, Issy, you women are all alike,' and whistling a favourite tune he climbed the fence and proceeded to his farmyard.

Isabel reported her success to her mother and sister.

The former said, 'Well, I think, my dears, it is best really to ask them. You know Mr. Herbert is quite the gentleman and very clever, and Mrs. Vesey thinks a great deal of this. I think the Herberts would be hurt, and justly so, if we overlooked them. I am sure I have always encouraged Mr. Herbert to come here; it is so good for young men to see society.'

'Well, then, Kate,' said her sister, rather impatiently, 'we'll go to-morrow and ask them.'

'We? I don't see why you say *we*, Issy, it is all your own doing.'

'O, you are Miss Lang, you know; it will come better from you. However, if you don't like the ride, I'll go with Willie.'

'O, do go, my dear Kate,' said her mother.

And Kate, who liked being asked more than once, at last consented to accompany her brother and sister.

Mr. Herbert and his sister were at breakfast the next morning when they heard merry voices and horses' feet pass the window.

'It is the Langs, Kate and Issy and William ; what can they be come for, I wonder ?' said Miss Herbert.

Mr. Herbert rose, and on seeing Isabel jump from her horse and knock at the little verandah gate, he walked out. Willie rode round to the stock-yard to see the foals branded, and Kate began with—
'Mr. Herbert, papa and mamma hope you will, you and your sister, I mean, join us in a pic-nic to the Sugar Loaf next week, and . . .' here her horse fidgeted at the flies, and Isabel took up the speech—
"and come the evening before, if you please ; we can give you beds. The Veseys will be there, and perhaps the Jollys ; we want you particularly to show us the way by the flats. And don't you think the gig can go ? We want Miss Terry to come so much, and she won't ride, you know."

'Yes, a gig can go, or you can have our spring-cart ; they must get out at the bridge, it would not be safe to go over that, I think.'

'Well, then, you will come ? Thursday week is the day. But you must come on Wednesday.'

'I see my sister is settling it all with Kate,' said Mr. Herbert, 'so come and let me show you my favourite little filly, she is worth seeing !'

Isabel followed him to the stock-yard, where all the foals were collected.

'I suppose that is Pearl,' said she, pointing to a milk-white creature with slender legs.

'Yes, there is Pearl, she is quite tame and gentle, she will make a beautiful lady's horse !'

'How I should like to ride her,' said Isabel.

'Will you try? she is broken in. Let me put the side-saddle on.'

'Yes do, Issy,' said Willie. 'I saw Jack riding her the other day, and he said she was quite gentle.'

Willie ran off for the saddle, and in a few minutes Pearl was caught, and Isabel seated on her back. She arched her neck and took a bound or two, but Mr. Herbert had hold of her, and Isabel was too good a horsewoman to feel the slightest fear.

'Try her paces, Issy, round the paddock,' said Willie.

He took down the slip-rail as he spoke, and Isabel put the beautiful creature into a canter, and was half round the paddock before Mr. Herbert and Willie had proceeded more than a few steps.

"Doesn't she ride well, that's all," cried he, in boyish delight. "And that's a beauty, Mr. Herbert; how much would you take for her?"

Mr. Herbert did not answer—his sister called him, and he had to go back, and give a quick assent to the plan she was proposing for the pic-nic. Before he returned to the rail Isabel had stopped and was patting Pearl's neck and praising her.

'Now try her walk,' said Mr. Herbert, and he kept by her side. 'Just come this way, and I will show you the site I have fixed on for a house,' and he took down another slip-rail, and calling to Willie to put it up again, he led the way through the bush at the back of the house.

Willie did not care about the site, he went back to the stock-yard and talked to the stockman.

Kate seeing that her sister had gone off, accepted Miss Herhert's offer to look at her bees. The bee-house was at the bottom of a vine-walk in the garden.

A low fence divided it from a crop of green barley, and this fence was one mass of passion-flower and the multiflora rose intermixed. Miss Herbert was fond of her garden and bees, and was proud to show them.

‘Look at this native fig-tree,’ said she, ‘isn’t it a magnificent shrub? You don’t know what pains and trouble I had to save it last summer in the drought! But now it repays me. It is such a rich dark green to rest one’s eyes on after the blue gum-trees!’

‘How nice it must be to have so tidy a garden!’ said Kate. ‘We never can make anything grow, and papa will not have a proper garden made because of the expense and trouble.’

Miss Herbert laughed, and said it was absurd for Mr. Lang to talk of expense.

‘Now he had built such a fine house he ought to have a good garden, and also a good road up to his house.’

‘Very true, Miss Herbert. But times are very bad, and I assure you, papa is very uneasy. He almost thought we could not go to the Government Ball on the Queen’s birthday. But, however, mamma has managed it, so it is settled, luckily for us, for it would be so odd not to go, and Issy is to ‘come out’ regularly then. And we are to have new dresses. Only think of the Whites! They are so curious to know what we shall wear, and they have spread a report that papa has sent to England for pink satins! They only did that out of spite, they know it is not true. Mamma says simple dresses are the best, and Mrs. Vesey, who is going, and knows all about such things, is only going to wear white muslin.’

‘Well, you are preparing in time, at any rate,’ said

Miss Herbert, gathering flowers as she slowly walked on, and listened to Kate's chatter. 'There are three months yet to the ball.'

'Why, we do think of it, of course, there has been so much talk as to whether we go or not, and we lead such dull lives!'

'How very intimate you seem to be with Mrs. Vesey already,' remarked Miss Herbert.

'Yes, haven't we got on? And what a charming person she is! So clever and stylish and fashionable! By the way, I am so glad your brother is gone. I never dare talk before him!'

'Indeed! you surprise me! Your sister does not appear to mind it.'

'No, not at all. But they have always been such allies, you see. Issy rattles on a good deal with every one. Mamma says that it is high time for her to remember she is a young lady, and grown up, and so on. Mr. Herbert is so accustomed to treat her as a child. That is the worst of going on for ever with the same people. There is poor Tom Jolly! I am sure I don't mean to be unkind; but really, if he expects that I can go on, being such particular friends now, he is wrong. It can't be! I tell Issy the same about your brother. You can't think,' she went on, not waiting for any comment or answer, but changing the affected tone to one of more open self-content, 'how much Issy was admired at Sydney! She was well dressed, and really looked very well. Here, you know, she has never been much thought of; but there she made quite an impression, I can tell you.'

'In Sydney! I dare say. But if she doesn't learn a quieter manner she will find it will end there, with an impression, as you call it. Gentlemen may like to

laugh and joke, but they would not like that manner in a wife.'

'No ; I often tell Issy so, and so does mamma. But papa never sees a fault in her. And Miss Terry makes so much of her. Somehow people don't seem to mind her way so much. Do you know—please don't tell any one, though—that Mr. Farrant admires Issy very much indeed. He is so very often at our house, and lends her books and all that. By the way, what will Mr. Herbert say to it, I wonder ? But where are they gone ? We ought to be on our way home.'

'What can it be to my brother whether or no Mr. Farrant admires your sister ?' exclaimed Miss Herbert, with some indignation. 'He has always looked upon her as a little girl—nothing more. He has been very kind, but I assure you, Kate, that——'

'No, I know ! Of course ! I didn't mean anything. Why, he is quite like an uncle to Issy ! But, dear Miss Herbert, let us go after them, please.'

Meanwhile, Mr. Herbert had been leading Pearl up the ascent, clearing a way through the scrub, or under-wood, till he came to a small cleared piece of ground overlooking the cottage and settlement of huts.

'This would be the place for a house,' he said.

'The Parsonage is the prettiest place here,' Isabel answered.

'Not prettier than this might be, I am sure. I hear you have made a sketch of the Parsonage.' And Mr. Herbert patted Pearl's neck.

'Yes, for Mr. Farrant to send home. It is very nice having him—and then the Veseya. Weren't you surprised at all these changes ?'

'Yes. By the way, Isabel, I hope you are on our *side* about this bridge ?' Mr. Herbert presently said.

‘Indeed, I am on papa’s side.’

‘What, if I prove to you that the other is the right line for the public? Come, listen to reason.’

‘I never could. My reasoning goes to make me follow papa.’

‘Absurd! Where would that take you if carried out? Women are all alike, I do believe!’

‘Yes—always right,’ she said, demurely.

‘Are you and I to quarrel, then, over this vexed question?’

‘You know best. I am full of peace, I assure you.’

‘Own that you think our view the right one, and I will excuse your perhaps natural wish to please your father.’

‘I can’t own what I don’t know.’

‘You ought to know—you ought to influence your father. What is your sense given you for? Isabel, I hoped great things——’

‘Hope told a flattering tale! But, come, I will use my influence and use my sense. Mr. Herbert, do give up this once—just for the sake of peace.’

She put on her most loving manner, and touched his arm lightly with her whip.

‘Foolish girl!’ he laughed. ‘Seriously, though, I dread all this business. Why, no one with any reason can deny that Bengala Creek is the place for the bridge. The other road makes the way at least four miles longer.’

‘O dear! how I do wish there were no such things as bridges and all those dull things. I am so tired of the subject!’

‘Then let us change it. But some day I must try to convert you yet. I must not forget to show you a book of sketches I bought for you.’

‘For me?’

‘Yes—I filled it with studies of trees, and even huts. I thought you might like it. And I have some queer tales to tell about some of the scenes.’

‘It was very civil of you,’ she said, evidently pleased. ‘But don’t expect a speech, for I am a bad hand at thanking.’

‘Never mind! But I shall claim my guerdon some day, remember. Let us take a turn this way. You are in no hurry, I hope, for I have a great deal to say.’

‘What is it?’

‘Ah—well! I hardly remember at this moment. Do you like Mrs. Vesey?’

‘Do I like her? Well—hem—can’t say. She is immensely amusing and sharp. You have no idea how she cuts us all up, one after another—even you—your peculiarities don’t escape her.’

‘Pleasant, certainly! but what are my peculiarities, as you are pleased to call them?’

‘O! I suppose you don’t think yourself the least peculiar! O, no! Mr. Herbert is just like every one else. He never stands for ten minutes together staring into the air over his chin, or never sits silent during the whole of dinner, only vouchsafing a ‘Pshaw’ to express his utter contempt for all the party—he never——’

‘Come, come, Isabel—nonsense! besides, remember I have been many years in the Bush.’

‘Indeed! Are you so very sure you were better behaved before? Poor Bush! you have to bear the faults of a great many. What a wreck is here!—the once accomplished gentleman Oh dear me! who would come to the Bush?’

‘You are the most absurd girl I ever met with.’

‘No wonder! I was born and reared in the Bush!’

Mr. Herbert made no answer to this. Isabel was accustomed to his ‘silent fits,’ as she called them, and she wished to see how long it would last now. So she said nothing. When they reached the paddock, they saw Kate and Willie evidently looking for them.

‘Pleasant dreams to you, Mr. Herbert,’ said Isabel, laughing, and at the same time touching Pearl with her whip smartly, at which the spirited animal bounded forward, and before Mr. Herbert recovered from his surprise, Isabel had crossed the paddock, and was dismounted and laughing at her own feat, while Willie led Pearl back and called for his sister’s pony. Before it was all settled, and while Kate was reminding Miss Herbert of the hour and the day fixed upon for their coming, Mr. Herbert came up, trying to look very grave and dignified, though somewhat out of breath.

‘Wait for the sketch-book. I will not be one moment.—I suppose Willie is to be trusted to carry it?’ said Mr. Herbert, producing a neatly folded parcel.

‘I will not trust him—give it to me, Mr. Herbert,’ said Isabel. ‘Thank you,’ she added; ‘you are an excellent man, notwithstanding all I said just now, and, if you are inclined to be sociable, you may as well ride to Langville this evening. You have not heard Miss Terry sing; and—and—it is very likely—not impossible—that Mr. Farrant will be there, and, if so, there will be duets. I think that even your fastidious taste would be pleased—Good bye!’ and she kissed her hand and cantered after her sister.

‘Issy, how could you ask him for this evening? I’m sure papa wont be over pleased,’ said Kate.

‘Never mind, Kate ; papa will say nothing if there is music. I don’t suppose he will really come, but I want to see him and Miss Terry together ; and he is in such a very good humour—you need not be at all afraid of him to-day.’

There were visitors at Langville. Amelia Jolly and her brother were standing in the verandah when the Langs rode up to the house.

Amelia was rather older than either Kate or Isabel, a thoroughly good-humoured though plain girl, who thought Langville House and its inhabitants quite perfection. Her brother, a fine, well-grown young man, had been a devoted admirer of Kate’s ever since he was a boy at the King’s School, Paramatta. It had been coquettishly encouraged by Kate, even though her head was turned at a ‘finishing’ school in Sydney, where she had been taught, among other accomplishments, to look upon herself as a beauty and a fortune, and with far higher pretensions than to be worshipped by Tom. Mrs. Lang had condescendingly allowed the ‘poor young man’ to come whenever he liked to Langville, because it was such an advantage to him to see a little society, and the Jollys were very worthy, good kind of people, and Amelia always properly sensible of Mrs. and the Miss Langs’ kind notice. Mr. Lang liked the young man, and thought it all right that the young ones should enjoy themselves as they liked, though he said he wondered at Tom’s taste ; Issy would make ten times as good a wife !

But Kate had lately received a great deal of attention from others, and Tom’s blunt, honest manners failed to please her this morning. She gave him short answers, and retired to a sofa, where she whispered *to the admiring Amelia* an account of her visit to

Sydney, and all the gaieties she had entered into. Isabel happened to be busy in the store-room, and poor Tom was driven to look over some of Mr. Farrant's books which lay on the table. At last, Willie came to his relief, and proposed a visit to the stock-yard. The guests were invited to remain the rest of the day, as a matter of course, and according to Isabel's prediction, Mr. Farrant made his appearance about tea-time.

He was a very constant visitor, always having a book to show, or a chant he wanted the young ladies to try, or some business on which to consult Mr. Lang.

'Will you sing 'Lilla's a Lady,' Miss Lang?' asked Tom.

Isabel laughed.

'Miss Lang! do you hear, Kate? It isn't natural Tom, it won't do.'

Tom coloured up as he said something about 'old friends, and Sydney, and taking a liberty,' which no one heard so as to understand.

'May I open the piano?' he asked.

'O yes, if you like, and Miss Terry will sing,' said Kate.

'Ah, but she is not ready—just that one song, Kate—I haven't heard it so long,' he said, coming close to the back of her chair.

'O, don't tease, Tom? I'm not going to sing to-night; and as to *that* song, I positively hate it. It is as old as the hills.'

Tom sighed but pressed no more.

'Girls!' said Mr. Lang, rousing up from a nap in his easy chair; 'girls! what are you doing? What's the good of my buying a grand pianoforte, and paying such a long bill for teaching you to sing, Kate, if I am never to hear it? Come, Kate, bestir yourself!'

‘Papa!’ exclaimed Kate, ‘how you do talk! I am out of practice.’

‘Miss Terry will sing, papa,’ said Isabel, standing behind him and stroking his hair in a coaxing way.

‘Ah, she is very good-natured and never wants pressing, Issy. You may both take a leaf out of her book——’ but Isabel playfully put her hand before his mouth and said hush as the first chords were struck.

Presently Mr. Farrant’s voice was heard, full, deep, and mellow, in ‘Comfort ye my people.’

The talking and whispering was hushed, the little girls standing quite still, watching every turn in the singer’s face with open-mouthed attention and wonder. The boys looked as if they thought it a bad substitute for their sisters’ songs, but they sat very quiet for some time and then crept out of the room unobserved, to amuse themselves elsewhere. Song followed song. Miss Terry’s voice was clear and sweet. Daylight had faded, and Mrs. Lang, in the middle of her assiduous beating time with her foot, had dropped into a sly nap, very comfortable and unseen. Kate was lounging back on the sofa by her friend Amelia, Tom taking quiet observations and looking a little unhappy. Mr. Lang, who really loved music, was listening with all his soul, while Isabel had ensconced herself behind his chair, and sitting on a low stool, had buried her face in her hands.

‘That is a great treat! Thank you, ma’am!’ said Mr. Lang, drawing a long breath, as candles were brought in. ‘Eh, Kate? What mamma—asleep? Aye, as sound as a top.—O no!—of course—I understand, only shutting her eyes as usual! Mrs. Lang never is guilty of a nap, eh, Issy? Issy!—where’s the girl gone?’

‘Here, papa,’ she said, coming round.

‘Go and play a tune. You must not leave all the work to Miss Terry.’

‘O no, please! Nothing more after that. I can’t, indeed, daddy!’

Mr. Lang left the room presently to give some forgotten orders, and Mr. Farrant pressed Isabel to take some part in a trio, which she declined. He spoke of his love for music, hoping he should not ‘bore’ them, and she answered, but in so low a voice that Kate said—

‘Why, I do believe you have been asleep, Issy! Have you?’

‘No. Yet I believe I have been half dreaming too. It is very odd, but that last song made me think of our walk on the north shore that night, by moonlight. Do you remember, Kate? Well, and it also reminded me of that priest—what was his name?’

‘What, Father Mornay?’ said Kate; ‘what an idea! What connexion can Miss Terry’s song possibly have with a moonlight night and a Roman Catholic priest?’ And Kate laughed.

‘My dear Isabel,’ put in her mother, ‘that is just one of your fastidious notions’ (Mrs. Lang always used the word fastidious for anything she was not able to express clearly), ‘which you and Mr. Herbert encourage each other in. It is foolish, my love, very. Besides, it is hardly right or safe to be in the habit of alluding to a Catholic priest so lightly. The less you have to do with them the better.’

‘O, dear mamma, I have nothing to do with them!’ cried Isabel, amused. ‘This Dr. Mornay we met one day at the Kearneys, at North Shore; and certainly it is very odd, I don’t know that I have thought of him

from that day to this, but Miss Terry's song brought him quite before me, his voice and his look and all.'

'Is he handsome?' half whispered Amelia Jolly, who had risen, saying she must prepare for her ride home. 'Eh, Issy, is he handsome? because once I saw——'

What Miss Jolly saw did not transpire, for her brother interrupted her by urging expedition, and Kate offered to help her to dress, rather in a fit of perversity, and because poor Tom had come up in the last vain hope of having a few words.

Soon the sound of the horses' feet were heard clattering down the road. The rest of the party stood in the verandah looking at the brilliant, unspeakably calm light from the stars. Bats were whirling heavily in rapid flight around their heads. The clustering passion-flower waved gently to and fro. Mr. Farrant, Miss Terry, and Kate, went out to take a turn; Isabel remained where she was. It was very quiet. But the song echoed still in her ear. It was the first really good music she had ever heard. Something within was stirred—something she could not express weighed upon her, partly pain, partly pleasure. She strove to rally herself, feeling half ashamed at the new emotion; and, when presently her father came into the room, and finding no one there, stepped out to where she was, she put her arm into his, and stooping, kissed his hand.

'What is it, child? What ails ye?' he asked, struck with something unusual about his child.

'Nothing! nothing at all, daddy! I have been thinking; that's all.'

'Thinking, truly! Don't do it, Issy dear. Take *my* advice, and never be what you call 'thinking.'

Action is the thing. Thinking is the ruin of half the men and three parts of the women.'

'Is it? Well, but how can one help it, after hearing music?'

'What has music to do with thinking, eh, girl? Bless you, music is the best of all things to set one off, lead one to battle or anything—just the contrary of 'thinking.' By the way—there has been a terrible row again about that girl, Nelly. It seems Venn is sweet upon her.'

'Venn! O papa, don't let him have her!'

'Why not? A capital good thing for her.'

'I can't bear him. Besides, she is promised already.'

'Gammon! Promised! She hasn't two ideas in her head, and yet for the sake of a pair of innocent blue eyes and a sweet voice, all the men in the place are making themselves fools about her! They say she ran away from her step-mother, and was found in Lynch's hut. The Macleans are furious.'

'That woman does treat her miserably. I wish you would let Lynch marry her. He is very fond of her, papa.'

'I'll grant no such a favour to him. He deserves a flogging at this moment, for an insolent, sulky brute as he is. Now, Issy, don't be encouraging such a notion, for I am poz—send for the girl, and tell her to be steady and marry Venn. It is the best thing she can do.'

So saying, they overtook the others, and Isabel was startled by one of her brothers jumping out upon her from a bush. Passing an arm round her waist, he, considering that he had been silent enough, began a whole string of stories of alarms about bushrangers and ghosts. Mr. Farrant entered pleasantly into the

strain, and told his wonders too ; till he laughingly declared, he must go at once, or he should be afraid to face his ride home. Offers to remain the night were pressed upon him, but he persisted in being obliged to go. Willie, charmed by his stories, was so polite as to fetch his horse, and then go a little way to open the gate for him. He returned rubbing his hands in glee.

‘A jolly fellow, isn’t he?’

O Willie!’ exclaimed his sisters, in horror at the epithet.

‘I wonder, does he come here courting?’ the boy said, which set Kate off ; and brought upon himself a scolding from Isabel, and a gentle reprimand from Miss Terry. The prayer-bell ringing, they all went in by the window.

CHAPTER IV.

VINE LODGE.

‘**R**EALLY, my dear John,’ said Miss Herbert, a morning or two after the visit from the Langville party, ‘I think you ought to call on Mr. Vesey, eh?’

‘Hem,’ said Mr. Herbert, twisting his moustaches, and then stretching himself after a diligent perusal of the *Sydney Herald*.

‘I never pay morning visits,’ he added, presently.

‘Ah, but you should. You ought to come forward here and take your proper place; besides, these are strangers and gentlefolks, and as we are, it seems, to meet them at the Langs, it would be but civil, I do think, eh?’

‘They are not much in our style, I fancy; but, however, I have nothing very particular to do to-day, so shall we both ride there?’

Miss Herbert readily consented to accompany him, and they were soon on their way to Vine Lodge.

‘Mrs. Vesey was staying at Langville, was she?’ asked Mr. Herbert, as he rode lazily along, just in front of his sister, for the path was narrow; they having preferred a short bush cut to the usual road.

‘Yes, Mrs. Vesey came with them when they returned from Sydney. She and Mr. Fitz were guests

at Langville, while Mr. Vesey prepared his new house for them.'

'It was in a wretched state of ruin, as I recollect,' said Mr. Herbert. 'I heard of Vesey up the country—he has money, it is said.'

'Very likely ; so Mr. Budd says—and he is sure to know. I understand from our friend, Miss Warner, in Sydney, that Kate was very much talked of for that Mr. Fitz.'

'You have told me that so often !' said Mr. Herbert, impatiently. 'Hallo,' added he, as they came to a fence which commanded a view of the house, 'grand alterations, I declare ; ha ! that's an improvement.'

A few minutes' riding brought them to the door, at which Mr. Herbert rapped with his whip handle ; knockers and bells being very rare, or quite unknown in the district.

Mrs. Vesey's slight, well-dressed figure appeared at the open window, and with her glass at her eye, she reconnoitred her visitors. On seeing who it was, she stepped quickly into the verandah, holding out both hands, and expressing the greatest possible delight at seeing both the lady and gentleman ; 'it was so kind, so very neighbourly—gentlemen generally were such wretched hands at visiting.' Miss Herbert was carefully dismounting during this warm welcome, and her brother only frowned, while he led off the horses to the stable, answering to Mrs. Vesey's apologies at there being no man—'that he was quite accustomed to the work, and never trusted his horses to any colonial servant.'

The parlour was scantily furnished, the floor bare, and the walls only whitewashed ; but the lady had contrived to make it look very habitable. A few

flowers tastily arranged in tumblers stood on the table—a handsome work-box lay open; spirited sketches and a few finished drawings were ‘littered’ about with studied negligence; and last, but not least, a harp and music-stand gave a certain air to the room, which at once struck Miss Herbert.

Mr. Herbert soon came back accompanied by Mr. Vesey, who was good looking, with a very fresh, clear complexion. He had not much manner, and he made a great deal of sound when he talked, filling up gaps with pompous hems and haws, and he also had rather a trick of leaving his sentences unfinished for his wife to conclude for him, or if she were otherwise engaged, Mr. Vesey drew in his breath with his teeth shut, which had a very significant effect. He had a very high opinion of his wife, though to hear him sometimes, people might run away with an idea that he was a perfectly tyrannical husband, and ‘Laura’ a mere cipher. Certainly, as Mrs. Lang remarked to her husband, Mr. Fitz had much more to say, and ten times more manners, but then Mr. Vesey was very good-natured, and had a very handsome fortune.’

‘Do you begin to feel settled?’ asked Miss Herbert, by way of saying something.

‘Why—hem—aw—settled? why, hardly . . .’ ‘O, we’re in a horrid rummage!’ said Mrs. Vesey, interrupting her husband. ‘It is indeed nothing short of one of Hercules’ labours to make this place habitable.’

‘It is thought a good farm,’ remarked Mr. Herbert.

‘Ah! well, of course, that is the point—aw—hem; ladies . . .’

‘Make great sacrifices when in an unlucky moment they consent to emigrate, don’t you think so, Miss Herbert. It is very much like being buried alive!’

Just imagine, with so many families in the district—that's the term, I believe?—and not even a book-club! How can one exist? How do you manage, Miss Herbert?

Miss Herbert thus appealed to, in a grave manner, began to explain how she occupied herself, how very different her life now was to that she had been accustomed to. And Mrs. Vesey nodded and shook her head, and seemed to listen with the greatest sympathy and attention, drawing out the old and well-loved history of Bath, and Bath friends.

'Laura!' said Mr. Vesey; 'what was the name of hem—that—that fellow, you know; a neighbour, you know—aw—of your father's; kept hounds, you know. . . .'

'Sir Charles Herbert, do you mean?'

'Yes, exactly gentlemanly man—hem—any relation of yours, hey?'

'My uncle,' Mr. Herbert answered, drily; and then rising and going to the window he reminded his sister that he had a long round to take before they went home.

'O, positively!' exclaimed Mrs. Vesey, jumping up; 'you shan't go in such a hurry. Have pity on me, Mr. Herbert, I pray, and remember how long it is since I have met a rational creature. I can't—Mr. Vesey wont allow you to cut your visit short in this way. My harp is strung and tuned, and I want you to hear a new waltz.'

'By Jove!' exclaimed Mr. Vesey, striding to the window, and peeping under Mr. Herbert's arm, 'who on earth—hem!—who *are* these? why, it is what's-her-name, I declare!'

'Miss Lang!' said his wife, running to the other

window ; while Miss Herbert, not having heard what was said, followed as soon as she could gather up her habit.

‘Kate and Jem Lang,’ she said ; ‘and who are they in the gig?’

‘That’s little Miss what’s-her-name, and—hem—Laura—they will stay, you know, aw—for’

‘Lunch, certainly. Call Arthur, Mr. Vesey, will you ; it is utterly out of the question that I can entertain all single handed—pray, I beseech you, not to go’ she turned as she spoke to where Mr. Herbert had stood, but he was gone ; he and Mr. Vesey had stepped out of the window, and were assisting the ladies to dismount. Mrs. Vesey repeated her request to Miss Herbert, who answered, it must rest with her brother, she had no objection to remain.

The dining-room was small ; a narrow, ill-shaped room, but, with a little clever contrivance, it held all the party.

‘Well—hem’—said Mr. Vesey, as he handed Miss Herbert to a chair. ‘This is what I call, a what’s-is-name, pleasant kind of thing. I hate, you know, ceremony, and—aw—what shall I help you to? Laura, what’s that? and as he surveyed the prettily laid out dishes, he devoutly hoped none of the guests were very hungry, and heartily wished ‘Laura’ would undertake to carve for the party she had pressed into her service.

Mr. Herbert expressed his dislike to anything in the shape of lunch, and as there was but little room, he stood by the window, behind Mr. Vesey’s chair.

‘Well, we shall muster all the district soon!’ exclaimed Mr. Herbert ; ‘here is Tom Jolly!’

‘Ho, Jolly Tom, bid him come in ; he is my especial delight,’ said Mr. Fitz, with much gravity, and he

contrived to put Jolly Tom a little out of countenance as he rose and bowed very low, and said he supposed he was hungry, and smelt the cold beef ; but the more the merrier, and so on, looking hard at the somewhat shy young man all the time ; while Mr. Vesey muttered to himself about a 'confounded shabby affair for so many mouths,' and Mrs. Veseys terrible eye-glass was up, while she thanked Mr. T. Jolly over and over again for being so very kind as to take the trouble of paying them a visit.

'Well, ma'am, to say the truth, I met Willie Lang, and he told me I should find the Miss Langs here, and as I had a message for them, you see, I thought I couldn't do better than follow. How do, Kate,' he said, stretching out his arm behind Mr. Fitz to reach her, and then colouring all over at the polite bow he received, instead of the hearty shake he intended to give.

Isabel came to his relief. 'I am so glad you came Tom ! will you come here ? There is plenty of room.'

But Tom was no lunch eater either, and rather awkwardly, though with the most good-humoured face possible, he retreated to where Mr. Herbert had taken his station, and they were soon in full talk. When lunch was over, Mrs. Vesey proposed going to look at the garden ; Mr. Fitz led the way with Kate ; Tom watched them, but did not appear disposed to follow, till Isabel laughed, and blushing as she spoke, beckoned him to her side, and then taking his arm, she led him away.

'Did you see that?' exclaimed Miss Herbert, looking at Miss Terry, at the same time making a movement with her hands to express astonishment and pity.

'I assure you it is all from high spirits,' said Miss

Terry, smiling. 'I assure you, Miss Herbert, she is a very simple-minded, true-hearted girl.'

'Ah, you are so kind in judging others,' answered Miss Herbert, laying her hand on Miss Terry's arm; 'and now will you allow me to introduce my brother to you? John!' and she turned back to him, refusing to listen to Miss Terry's assurance that she had been already introduced, and as she formally led him up to Miss Terry with an air of pride, as much as to say, 'Look at him, how different from every one else!' there was the peculiar inquiring expression of eye, so often seen in deaf people, as she watched the movement of his lips. After this, Miss Herbert stepped back to join Mrs. Vesey, who had gone to fetch her parasol.

In the midst of Mrs. Vesey's explanations of plans for improving the garden, Miss Herbert found time and opportunity to observe that her brother was making himself agreeable to the very pretty little governess whom she patronised. He was evidently pleased and pleasing, and this put his sister into very good humour. Soon, however, a sound of merry ringing laughter made them all look up. It was Isabel: she had made a bet with Mr. Vesey that she would mount a ladder which stood against part of the house where they were repairing the roof. Mr. Vesey was sure no lady had nerve for it, and Isabel, thus dared, mounted it and sat herself on the roof, holding by a chimney. Mr. Vesey clapped his hands, and declared she was a spirited girl, and then in his excitement he proceeded to take away the ladder, leaving her in a somewhat giddy position. Isabel, however, would own no fear. She sat still, and only laughed, while Tom stood by looking as if he thought

Mr. Vesey was going rather too far. When Miss Herbert saw it, she turned sharp round and said it gave her vertigo even to look at her. Mrs. Vesey spied at her and laughed. Miss Terry looked alarmed, and earnestly begged Mr. Vesey to put back the ladder.

‘No, that I wont ; ha ! why, she isn’t giddy, you know, at all ! She has been badgering me, hem ! and faith, you know it’s all fair play. If she’ll own she’s giddy’

But Isabel shook her head.

‘Give me this, if you please,’ said Mr. Herbert, in an authoritative manner, at the same time taking the ladder from Mr. Vesey, and placing it against the house. He planted it firm, and then said—‘Come down, Isabel, and come backwards.’

She coloured up, but obeyed in silence. When she reached the ground she laughed again, and threatened revenge on Mr. Vesey.

‘How could you be so silly ?’ said Mr. Herbert.

‘Silly ! I think I was very brave.’

‘You might have broken a limb—your spirits run away with you ;’ and Mr. Herbert looked grave.

‘I know what runs away with some one else,’ she answered, still laughing ; ‘but however, as I don’t mean to acknowledge myself silly, or to say I am sorry, and am not in a humour for lecturing, I wish you good-bye ! Come, Tom, let us go into the garden.’

She ran on, followed by Tom and Mr. Herbert. Presently she stopped, and leaning against the fence, said—

‘Why don’t you go to Miss Terry, Mr. Herbert ?’

‘Because I had rather stay here—I mean to see that you play no more pranks.’

‘But we don’t want you, do we, Tom? Come, now, I am sure you like Miss Terry—don’t you?’

‘I don’t know her much as yet,’ said he, looking half-amused.

‘I want you to cultivate her acquaintance, and I know so well what you will say to her—‘Such a dreadful girl is that Isabel! so vulgar! so boisterous! Do teach her a little of your own gentleness.’’

Mr. Herbert and Tom both laughed as she imitated the former.

‘You flatter yourself too much, Isabel. How do you know we have not better subjects to talk of than yourself?’

‘Why, I saw such grim displeasure on your brow just now, it is so natural you should give vent to it, since you know you dare not *now* take me to task.’

‘I have something else to say to you,’ said Mr. Herbert, ‘but I see you are in no mood to hear me.’

‘What is it about?’

‘I’ll tell you if you will leave off joking and listen. Ah,’ seeing Tom walk away, ‘I am glad he is gone. Now listen. I want to have some serious conversation with you. I must ask you something.’

‘How solemn! Are you sure that I shall answer, Mr. Herbert?’

‘Pshaw, Isabel,’ he said, somewhat impatiently, ‘I am tired of joking.’

‘Thank you, sir, you are very complimentary!’ said she, curtsying low. ‘Good morning;’ and she climbed the fence before he knew what she was about, and in another minute was begging Kate to ask for their gig and horses. Mr. Fitz protested against this, but Isabel was firm; Jem was despatched to the stable, and the ladies were soon putting on

bonnets and riding skirts. Mr. Fitz politely walked by Kate and her brother to the slip rails, and Miss Terry was begging Isabel not to flourish about her whip, and 'to please to look at the horse, and not at Tom Jolly !' but Isabel had many last words for him and messages to his mother, and as she gave him a hearty shake by the hand, tears stood in his eyes. Isabel talked to the horse, who was eager to get on, but once more, to Miss Terry's alarm, she pulled up the reins, and turning round, nodded to Mr. Herbert.

'Good-bye !' she said. He took off his hat and bowed.

'Just as you please,' she said to herself, though loud enough for Miss Terry to hear. Then touching the horse with her whip, they dashed over the rough new-made road in a way which made Mr. Vesey stare and shrug his shoulders.

CHAPTER V.

THE PETITION.

IT was some little time before either of the ladies spoke ; but when the horse pulled up at a hill, Miss Terry, with a sigh of relief, said—‘ Well, my dear Isabel, I was wondering if the horse was running away !’

Isabel laughed. ‘ Were you really afraid ! I beg your pardon ; but do you know what a relief it is sometimes to drive or ride or run fast, as it happens ? It is such a cure for vexations ! There ! I am all right again now, as cool as possible !’

‘ What had happened to put you out, may I ask ?’ said Miss Terry, smiling.

‘ Ah ! thereby hangs a tale ! I’ll tell you all about it one day. Miss Terry, what do you think of our society ? you have seen all now. Mr. Herbert is our last lion.’

‘ I shall answer by asking your opinion. I know but little of any of them, and am not quick at becoming acquainted.’

‘ How cautious you are ! Well, no wonder, poor little timid soul as you are, suddenly brought into these wild parts, among such a rough set ! What do I think of them ? Well, let me see, first our friends the Herberts ; the lady is a mixture, she holds us very cheap, and yet can’t do without us, she is an

affectionate sister, though rather exigeante, as we were taught in our vocabularies. She is not bad-hearted, and not good-tempered. She does not like being Miss to the end of her days, and yet finds no one worthy of alliance with the Herberts—The Herberts! I will own to you in confidence, it sounds better than the Langs, but names are fiddlesticks. . . .’

‘My dear Isabel again! Now that is one of the expressions I protest against. What can you mean by it?’

‘Oh, it stands for nonsense, humbug, and all sorts of things; I think it is an innocent kind of word after all, it comes out so plump too, ‘fiddlesticks.’ But to please you, I’ll eschew it, indeed I will. You don’t say, ‘how vulgar; Issy!’ like Kate, or order me to be more careful, like Mr. Herbert. By the bye, I always enjoy horrifying him of all things in the world.’

‘Well, so I guessed from what I saw to-day; but I suppose he takes it as you mean it?’

‘Oh, not always; besides, there is such a thing as being in earnest in joke. Do you understand? I don’t see any use in being afraid of flesh and blood, even when ornamented with moustachios. I always defy Mr. Herbert, and we give each other rap for rap, I always coming round to sweet temper the soonest. But how do you like him?’

‘He is very much what you led me to expect, only perhaps more agreeable.’

‘I saw he was on his good behaviour to you. Well! I am glad you like him, and I am sure he will like you. But did you remark his way of helping his sister to wine?’

‘Yes, I did certainly, and I thought of what you said the other day.’

‘Yes, that’s it. It isn’t that one objects to his being attentive to her, it is all very right, but it is done in such a way. *My* sister, Miss Herbert! as if she was the only person worth thinking of. It offends my good father and mother.’

‘It is a pity that he has that brusque way, but nevertheless, Isabel, I like his face. It is an expressive countenance, and his whole bearing is quite that of a gentleman; nay more, almost aristocratic. But go on with your idea of the people.’

‘Well, then, next to the Herberts comes Dr. Marsh, as a matter of course; a kind of note of admiration to be affixed to their names, for the little Doctor grows eloquent in praise of that ‘superior fellow Herbert, and that extremely agreeable woman, his sister.’ But I will pass him over and Captain Smith, who, in his regimentals, serves to dress up a room, booby as he is.’

‘Pray do not use such a term, Isabel.’

‘Well, you must confess him very silly, and that is tantamount to being a —; but I’ll be a good girl, and spare you.’

‘Mr. Tom Jolly, Isabel, what is he?’

‘What! why an honest man, every inch of him! worth a dozen Fitzs, with studs and chains and rings to boot; worth, Miss Terry—more worth loving a vast deal than all the fine gentlemen in the world, and his father and his mother too, I love them all.’—Isabel’s eyes glistened as she spoke, then smiling, and returning to her former tone, she added, ‘It was a mistake; depend on it, Tom should have fancied me, and not Kate.’

‘You had better tell him so, then.’

‘To be sure! so I have a dozen times over. And now we will trot on, if you please; I have fulfilled your wishes to perfection, I am sure.’

‘Not quite ; there is one missed out—Mr. Farrant.’

‘O no, no ! I am not going to meddle with him—he is one of your perfect characters—no, thank you.’

‘But I particularly wish to know your opinion of him—I have a particular reason,’ said Miss Terry, looking out for the stumps as she spoke.

Isabel too seemed to look attentively at the road, as she answered,

‘Have you, though ? What reason can you have ?’

‘O pray mind the stumps, Isabel, and don’t upset us in this awful-looking place !’ exclaimed Miss Terry.

By the time they had surmounted the difficulty they were overtaken by Kate and Jem, who had dawdled behind them, and then all Isabel’s attention was devoted to picking out the best track. At last, when they got into the high road, she said, speaking quickly, and as if with restrained emotion, ‘Are you very unhappy up here, Miss Terry ?’

‘Unhappy ! what can you mean, Isabel ?’

‘I mean that you must, in your heart, think us strange folks, and I often fancy you look astonished and disgusted.’ . . She sighed, and then went on. ‘You and Mr. Farrant—of course I see and feel all the difference—you think me a great Tomboy—with something good at bottom, perhaps—but sadly wrongheaded. Just, in fact, what I think myself, and yet not like, for,—would you believe it, I could find it in my heart to cry when I think of you and then of myself. O ! don’t be afraid !—I am not really going to shed a tear,’ said she, laughing, as Miss Terry laid her hand on hers. ‘The downright truth is, I think you the best little thing I ever saw, and the prettiest and the dearest ; but I am not going to be swearing eternal friendship and all that stuff, only I wish I was a child again, and

under you. . . . You see I did not go to school with Kate, so I never learned to be prettily behaved and so forth, for the truth is, I would not go to school—and I was always my dear daddy's darling, you know—and go I didn't. I ran wild in sun-bonnet and holland pinafore, except when Mr. Herbert tried to teach me drawing, and he tried to get me to read too. He meant to be very kind, and I liked laughing and quarrelling with him, and thought him vastly superior ; but oh dear ! I am very silly. Do you think me very dreadful, Miss Terry ?

‘ If I told you all I think, you would consider me a flatterer and insincere, Isabel. I will not say that I don't see your faults, but I am very sure that you will conquer them, and they are very much on the surface.’

‘ Well ! no one knows what I may become with you. Your eyes tell me how I shock you ; but, now, don't you think, Miss Terry, people do make too much of little things, and that there is a little insincerity, after all, veiled under a polite, or as Mr. Herbert says, ‘ refined ’—that's his favourite word, by the bye—a ‘ refined ’ manner ?

‘ Are you very sure that your own manner is always a true index to your mind, Isabel ?

‘ I laugh when I could cry often enough, and I will confess—but no, I won't confess anything now—for here we are at home, and that lazy boy, Jem, has left down the rails—I think he might have stayed to let us through. Now, you must hold the reins while I get out. If Mr. Herbert were here, his chin would nearly reach the sky in his indignant censures on the utter want of manner in the colonial youth, ‘ to leave a lady to put up a slip rail.’ Now guide him through

steadily. Famous! why, you'll be a whip in time. By the bye, Mr. Farrant, I suspect, is astonished at Kate and me for driving; but you see I have brought you back safe and sound.'

Isabel was proceeding to put up the rails again herself, when a man drew near. He shifted his hat slightly, as if he intended to be respectful, but didn't know how exactly.

'I'll put it to rights, miss.'

'Good evening, Lynch,' said Isabel, as soon as she recognised one of her father's men. At this the hat was taken fairly off; and, looking at her in a peculiar way, he said—

'I made so bold as to try to see you this evening, Miss Isabel.'

'Why, have you anything to say?' and Isabel drew back her foot from the gig step as she spoke.

'I've a strange request to make,' said the man, holding the horse, who seemed inclined to fidget at the delay. 'I have no right, as you may think, to say it, but they say as how you are a kindly-natured young lady, and there's one you were good to long ago, who is ashamed to cross your path now. Maybe you've heard'—here he hesitated and patted the horse absently—'you've heard, no doubt, of the girl Ellen Maclean, and how she ran away from her hard stepmother?'

Isabel nodded assent.

'Well, then, she is as innocent as yourself in respect to that affair, but never an hour's peace has the poor girl got since. That vixen, Mrs. Maclean, uses her shocking bad; and the girl's fairly pining. She would go down on her knees to you if you and the Missus would give her some work in the house. 'Tis her heart's desire to serve you, miss, but she dare not ask

the favour herself. Maybe you could shelter her, miss? 'Twill be doing her a great kindness.'

'I don't see how I am to do it,' said Isabel. 'There are servants enough already, and my mother, I fear, doesn't think too well of Ellen, and there are strange reports——'

'For the love of Heaven, miss, don't blast the character of the most ill-used girl that ever trod this earth!' exclaimed he, with great agitation. 'She has had a kind word for Jack Lynch, and he has promised to marry her. What crime in that? She is as innocent as an angel, and has not the wit that some have to stand scorn and cruelty. Miss Isabel, I give you my word and honour, she'll die or go crazed if she isn't taken out of all this. If she got into service it would save her, but she breaks her heart to leave this place.'

'I will speak to my mother, Lynch, and see what can be done, but don't expect too much.'

'Expect! I expect nothing! I beg your pardon, miss,' added he, in softened tones. 'You'll never repent doing a kind action for her, I'll warrant, and if she's happy I don't care what happens.'

Lynch again took off his hat as Isabel wished him good evening.

'Is that the man who wants to be married that I heard Mr. Lang speak of?' asked Miss Terry as they drove on.

'Yes. He doesn't seem much like a man to break one's heart for, does he? What the girl can see in his grim, convict-like appearance I can't think; but she is in love with him. She is a strange being; there is something wildish about her altogether. I used to be very fond of her, and she of me, till she took up this

Lynch. I wish they could marry ; but papa wont hear of it.'

Lynch remained standing by the slip rails, and as soon as the gig was out of sight, a slight figure timidly and cautiously crept out of the bushes near, and came up to him.

'You saw her then ?'

'I did, Nell ;' and his whole manner and expression changed into softness as he looked on her.

'I have watched her often and often as she passes out on foot or on horseback, but it is long since I spoke to her. Is there any hope ?' she added after a pause.

'She will see what she can do.' Lynch turned and leant on the fence as he spoke. 'And now, Ellen,' he continued, 'if you do get into the house, or if they get you another place—take my advice and think no more of me. You'll see what I say is true. I can't marry—I can't get my ticket—no ! I am sure, do all I can, something will happen. I try to keep out of his way, for his very voice stirs up my blood . . . You know 'tis reckoned a disgrace to you to have anything to say to me.'

'I don't care,' sobbed the girl ; 'ever since my mother died you were my best friend ; you, and then Miss Isabel. Folks call you a bad man, and dangerous ; but don't I know better ? you bear a heavy, lone heart. Wasp and I know it,—the creature ! poor dog !' she added, turning to pat a little rough terrier which had kept close to the man all the time.

'And don't, Jack,—don't just say a word in answer to the master—but bite your lips and think of the ticket, and keep down your anger. And as to me,' she added, raising her head and looking up at him affectionately, 'as to me—I don't care—I'll bear

everything. I've been used to hardship since that woman crossed our doorstep ; and if you could only set yourself to take sharp words or blows—as I do. Why, this is what I do ! I think,—never mind, they can't touch your heart within you ; and that's where happiness lies. I thought it was gone when my mother died. Ah ! that was the sorrowful day, and my father was so stern ! I feared him always ; and do you mind *you* came Lynch, and made me the beautiful nosegay, and sang the pleasant songs, and called me Golden Nelly, because of my yellow hair ?—and I cried so bitterly that time when you got punished.'

'Ay, ay, Nell, I remember ; but you are running on, and you forget you shouldn't be here. 'Tisn't much I can do, but by heaven they'll drive me to mischief if they harm you ! Now go home, my dear,' he added, soothingly ; 'go home by the Bush. I must go to my hut this way.'

She put her hand on his arm and said, 'And you saw Miss Isabel, and she said yes ?'

'Miss Isabel said she would try,' said Lynch. She waved her hand, and was soon out of sight among the bushes. He whistled to his dog and walked towards the farm in another direction.

CHAPTER VI.

EXCITEMENT AMONG THE CONVICTS.

A PENNY for your thoughts, Isabel,' said Miss Terry, looking up from her book.

'They are not worth it, and yet I believe they are to myself. I have done a foolish thing, Miss Terry. Did you observe how cool Mr. Herbert was to-day? I assure you I thought of it in church!'

'His manner is generally rather distant at first greeting, but I did not notice anything particular to-day.'

'It was so, though, and papa was worse. Stupid girl! it was all my own fault. That day at Vine Lodge I was in a wilful mood altogether. I can't resist it sometimes, I feel so contradictory; particularly if people look grave, like Mr. Herbert. He said he wanted to talk to me, and I began joking and left him. Now I find he wanted to talk about Lynch. O, you can't understand how vexed I am! I could have told him so much about it, and of all things I would have entreated him not to interfere with papa. Now, he has talked to papa about it, urged the marriage, and, just like him, entirely defeated his own purpose. Papa is very angry and annoyed at Mr. Herbert's interference, as usual, and ten times more determined than ever to oppose Lynch. Isn't it provoking?'

'You think you could have prevented it?'

‘To be sure! Mr. Herbert is just the last person in the world to whom papa would listen about his men, and Mr. Herbert’s is the very worst manner for advocating their cause; I don’t know how it is. However, I will leave no stone unturned to get Ellen into the house. She shall come, and I hope she will give up Lynch in time. She *shall* do so!’

Miss Terry smiled.

‘Ah, you smile. Well, I have had my tell, and I am in better humour now. But why did you smile; because I said *shall*? Do you know when I do really set my mind on a thing I generally have it. I believe every one may, only half the world are too indolent to try, and then they call that being amiable; I call it inanity, folly, indolence, anything—I despise it! There is a pleasure in having a good fight for one’s own way, even if one is conquered! Nothing irritates me so much as Do as you like, my dear—it is all the same to me—I don’t care how it is!’

Miss Terry laughed at Isabel’s comic manner and affected tone of voice.

‘Well, Isabel, I know now then that to please you I must always strive for my own way; so, here I am going out this bright lovely evening in spite of your having begged me to stay at home.’

Miss Terry went into the verandah, and presently Isabel followed.

‘Which way did they go, I wonder?’

‘To the Diamond Creek, I believe; the boys promised me some fringed violets, and Kate said they were sure to be found thereabouts.’

‘This way; come and see the sun set, Miss Terry,’ said Isabel, turning to some rising ground at the side of the house.

‘How plainly we hear the boys’ voices.’

‘Yes, and the hum from the farm—hark ! what a noise—what can it be ?’

They both turned to listen and to look, while peals of laughter were succeeded by loud hissing, and a sharp clapping of hands which echoed again and again, and caused two or three dogs to run from their mats in the verandah, and listen with ears and tails erect.

‘A curious noise for Sunday evening,’ said Isabel ; ‘and look—look at the men, running and throwing, yes, throwing stones at some one ! I hope it is no riot, but I live in dread of those men, and I know that Venn sets them up ! Hark again !’ She ran down the ascent, while the noise increased, and there was mingled with the clapping and hissing, a low angry sound like groans.

The man servant stood in the verandah, grinning wide.

‘What is it, Patrick ?’ inquired Isabel.

‘Only the men hissing Dan, miss ;’ and he grinned again as he pointed. ‘Look, he is skulking off like a fox. Ha ! that was a hit, however. Now, miss, he’s jumped the rails, the villain ! And for what does he dare to show his brutal face here among the lads ?’

‘Who is he ?’ said Isabel, at the same time watching the tall man running as fast as his legs could carry him, while occasional stones or sticks hit him or just missed doing so, and the men continued clapping and setting on the dogs.

‘Who is he, miss ? why Dan, just. But look—see, he’ll have a throw yet—see the crater !’

Isabel and Miss Terry looked as Patrick pointed. The man had reached a tree ; he turned and faced his enemies, and from his gestures seemed to be threatening

vengeance; then, as one of the dogs came up to him, he seized a large stone, and hurled it at the animal, who set up a loud and piercing howl. The furious clapping and hissing was renewed, but Dan was now among trees, and making the best of his way out of the farm.

‘You see that’s the flogger, miss. He is under a mistake to come here entirely. There’s many would kill him dead just could they get their fingers on him. They’d settle him—that’s Dan Cats Tail, as they call him, and sure he’s an ugly cratur, enough to frighten the very birds of the air. How did he come here, miss? Why sent on a message, I’m thinking, by the Captain Smith. But here’s the master.’

Patrick hurried away, and Miss Terry and Isabel went to meet the party, who were returning from their usual Sunday’s walk. Kate was leaning on her father’s arm; Mrs. Lang was a little behind with the children. As Isabel came up, he pushed Kate away; ‘There, Katie, you lean as heavy as your mother; you haven’t a light tread. Ha! Issy, my darling, where hast been—a deserter, a deserter—and the little woman there; moping, I see. Burn the books, say I, and come out for air and exercise.’ He put his arm on Isabel’s shoulder as he spoke, and so, talking and laughing, they all turned into the garden, where they strolled about in a leisurely way; now plucking a grape or a bud—now stopping to watch the regiment of ants, which in spite of gunpowder and tobacco and all the various war waged against them, persisted in destroying the gravel paths. Bees clustered round the oleanders—rose-breasted sparrows twittered like their browner sisters of the antipodes, while a few stray mosquitos, roused by the fresh evening breeze,

made it very desirable to have a head-covering. Groups of young bush trees which, defying the woodman's tomahawk had again sprung into life, encroached on the palisade fence which bounded the garden, while a hedge of quince and lemon inside the fence, gave the whole place a green and unformal appearance. The ground sloped from the house towards the bed of a creek which once or twice a year had water in it, and at the lowest part grew a magnificent willow, its pensile branches bowing in the slight rising breeze which had not power to stir its neighbour, a massy dark Norfolk Island pine. Above, that deep sky, awful in its grand, unclouded space,—below, all beautiful things, from the stately tree to the graceful vine wreath, casting a lengthened shadow.—The hum and murmur of life mingling with the low sighing in the leaves. The father leaning on his favourite daughter while half turning round to have a quiet joke with his wife, or playfully holding up Kate's rich dress with his walking-stick as she let it trail on the path,—the boys' chatter, the children's clear laugh,—for a time, all care and trouble seemed lost under the influences of that lovely sabbath evening.

Separated from this family group by one or two paddocks, stood the farm buildings, the mill, the forge, and a number of slab huts, and the overseer's cottage, with its glazed windows now flashing in the golden light. The uproar among the men which had startled Isabel had ceased, though a few voices sounded husky, and some faces were still flushed with excitement or anger, as they laughed and joked about it.

'That was well hit, Barney,' said one ; 'your blood was up, my boy !'

'Aye, Barney's blood is hot,' said another, as he

seated himself by his dog on a bank. 'One would think 'twas for O'Connell he was hallooing.'

Barney, a tall, overgrown Irishman with a slit and disfigured nose, answered by shaking his fists in the air. 'That's where ye are again, is it? By all the saints he's the true friend of the poor, and I shall always maintain that same, though it was for the love of himself I got sent to this same country at all, ill luck to ye!' and panting and hot from his chase after the hated flogger, Barney threw himself at full length on the ground.

'Dan had a warmish reception,' said one of the men, grinning and crossing his arms, while he looked round at the others. 'Wouldn't I have liked to tie him up to that tree!' muttered another, with clenched teeth.

This was hailed by a loud burst of laughter.

'What are ye sore yet, Philip? And, I say, look yonder at Lynch, hey?' said a slight man, who now advanced from behind. He was dressed carefully, a sprig of geranium stuck in his small flat hat, and he had silver rings in his ears and on his fingers, which were fine and taper. There was something stealthy in his tread, and unpleasant in his look, his head seemed to hide itself as it were, in his shoulders; his eyes were bent on the ground as he spoke, but he seemed to see everything notwithstanding. 'Ask Lynch why he didn't join in Dan's welcome, hey?' he said to a dark, large man, who had just lit his pipe, and whose countenance still glowed with anger.

'I saw you grinning behind the door, Gentleman Bill, and I thought it bad manners of ye! Ha! your turn may come yet, and then ye'll laugh at the other side of your mouth. By Jove, I'd just like to see you at

the triangle, and see if it would cure your horrid grin.'

'Wait till you catch me, Andrew ; but did it come to pass, mayhap I'd stand game as well as any of ye !'

'To see the fellow here !' . . . Andrew took up a stone as he spoke, and threw it with desperate force into the pond which lay at a few yards distance, uttering terrible oaths as he did so, while strong excited anger flashed from his eyes.

There was a flutter and hurry among the geese and the ducks as the stone plashed in, while Barney started up to see where it came from.

'That would have done something for Dan, had ye thrown it the right minute,' said Gentleman Bill, with a low, chuckling laugh. 'But I say, do but look at Lynch—Bob, look at him !' and he pulled the sleeve of a handsome young fellow, who was playing with a cockatoo.

'Bob' said something in reply, and then spoke to the bird. 'Forty down !' repeated the cockatoo ; 'Forty down !'

A loud hoarse laugh burst from all at this speech, and all eyes were directed towards Lynch, who stood leaning against a dead tree.

'D'ye hear, Lynch, d'ye hear that ?' said one. 'Cocky speaks !'

'I hear !' without turning his eye.

'And how did you receive Dan ?' asked another.

'With true love like a Christian to be sure !' sneered Bill. 'Lynch is setting up in life ; he's in search of a ticket and a wife, you know !'

'Cease your venom, you crawling serpent,' growled Andrew, as he removed his pipe from his mouth, and looking as if he longed to crush the little man with

one blow of his huge fist. 'Can't you let a man alone when his feelings is overpowering him?'

'Forty down, borne like a stone!' again screamed the cockatoo, which was followed by another loud peal of laughter.

'I'll wring thy vile neck if ye say them words again,' said Andrew, reaching towards the bird.

'Hands off, if you please,' said Bob, to whom Cocky belonged, while the bird erected his yellow plume, and stretched out its neck in warlike attitude.

'Talking of tickets,' added Bob, who perhaps thought it was time to change the conversation; 'how did you contrive, Bill, to get a ticket in such quick time?'

A sly, sidelong glance, and a silent prolonged chuckle, was the answer.

'Picked it out of some one's pocket,' said a dogged-looking man, the most shabbily dressed and uncared for, in appearance, of the whole set.

Bill shrugged his shoulders, as he said, 'No, no, it was got through good manners. Dear old lady, she'd believe and swallow everything I said, and would blub away when I touched upon home and friends, and innocence and misfortune. Bless her old soul! she believed it a rare piece of injustice that a civil, respectful fellow like William Smith, ever got shipped off for this place, ha! ha! Think of her fright;' he laughed so much here as to prevent his speaking for a moment, 'to think of her horrid alarm if she had known the best pickpocket in London was standing beside her! However, green as she was, she conducted herself like a gentlewoman to me, and so I behaved like a gentleman to her, and she recommended me as one deserving of every encouragement. So I got my ticket you see, and when the old girl departed this life, I left; for young

madam wouldn't do for me, and besides I had a fancy for change of air and scene.'

'By my soul, Bill, and you've nothing at all of a gentleman in ye, to be after speaking agin the lady, and she not aboveground!' said Barney. 'And wasn't it yourself just that cheated her under her very eyes, barnacles and all, and she looking at ye all the time and never seeing it, the cratur!'

'Oh, there wasn't much skill required for that,' answered Bill, with an air of mock humility. 'But I say, Lynch,' he added, seeing that man had moved forwards a little; 'I say, Lynch, come now, tell us why you kept your arms folded, and didn't give Dan a hit to help him on his way back to Merrima?'

A dark bitter smile passed over Lynch's face. 'If!——' and his voice was hollow and tremulous; 'if I had touched a stone, it would have struck true!'

'Well said, Lynch! I see you've some proper spirit in you yet, my lad.'

A buzz of approbation passed round. Lynch heard it. Another smile just touched his stern, rigid features—like a gleam from the lightning's flash over a stormy sea; and he walked away with the applause of his companions sounding in his ears—the applause of his world!

Lynch went towards the Bush, followed by his terrier, stopping to look absently at an opossum over head, or breaking down the young saplings that stood in his way. He was not long alone. Ellen joined him.

'Why, Jack, I thought the gloaming was going to pass away without my seeing you. Are you ill?' said she, suddenly.

‘Pshaw! who ever heard of a convict being ill? They are not flesh and blood like others, girl.’

She drew a long sigh as she gazed at him with sorrowful surprise. Presently, she said—

‘What was the row about a while ago? Any one might know the overseer was out of the way. Why, the hissing and clapping could be heard at our place, and the woman was for going to see what it was all about, but father wouldn’t let her, and while they were quarrelling I slipped away.’

‘The stone lay at my feet—it would have crushed his big head to atoms,’ Lynch muttered, apparently forgetful of Ellen’s presence.

‘Whose head, Jack?—what are you talking about? What ails you, Lynch?’ and she laid her hand on his arm.

‘The matter, Nell!’ said he, suddenly checking himself in an angry gesture. ‘The matter! Nothing—only Dan of Merrima has been here.’

‘And they pelted him, Jack?’

‘Aye, Nell.’

‘Poor fellow! And yet what can Dan help of it? It is his trade, you see; ’tis not on him it should be visited, any way.’

‘I’d like to see the man that would not if he could, take his life blood after tearing the flesh off your back for ye. I tell you, Nell, there’s not one has been under his cat but would kill him if they knew they were to be hanged for it the next minute. ’Tis nature!—nature is strong in us, Nell!’

The girl did not answer, but looked down at her own arms, which bore evidence of the marks of a stick. They walked on a little way in silence. At last she said—

‘I have been thinking of mother, Jack. I wonder if she knows what treatment I get—I wonder if she is ever about anywhere! Somehow I don’t think she can lie aisey and have her Nell used like a slave. Sometimes I could fancy I hear her when the wind goes moaning like in the trees. Do you ever cast a thought on your mother, Jack?’ she added, abruptly.

‘No; first when I got into trouble it came into my mind, but I wouldn’t think of her. Some thoughts wont do, Nell. But once I did dream of her—God help her! ’Twas after forty lashes, and though I took them like a stone, I fainted, and they gave me a something which made me stupid like, and, as I lay a dozing in horrid suffering, I thought in my dream I was looking at some pictures out of her old Bible, and, Nell, I saw one of a man being scourged, and my mother seemed to say, as she pointed to it—See how the Lord bore for you. I can’t say,’ added he, and his voice trembled, ‘but it was like enough to have happened years ago—she did try to teach me once—but——’

‘Keep that thought, Jack—keep it in your heart,’ said Ellen, looking earnestly at him, as he turned and leant against an iron bark tree.

He smiled—still bitterly—and then he stooped and gathered one of the delicate harebells, all folded up as it was for night.

‘Take that blossom, Nell, and put it on the fire, and see what comes of it.’

‘Why, it will wither, of course—shrivel up to nothing, Jack. It couldn’t live there.’

‘And there is a fire *here*, Nell!’ said he, fiercely, smiting his breast as he spoke with clenched hands. ‘Aye, a fire will kill and burn that kind of thought! But go home, girl—go home,’ he added, in a harsh

voice. 'Don't be bringing punishment on yourself again, or idle talk. Mind, I never asked this meeting—go home, Nell.'

Tears rolled down her face. She moved on slowly.

'Go home, my pretty Nelly,' he again said, in a softened tone, and throwing his arm round her. 'Taint fit for you to be here now. I shall be at the clearing to-morrow, maybe you'll look out about there, and now I must be off, for I hear the overseer's voice.'

He was soon gone, striding along over the brush-wood, unconscious that she still watched him. When he was no longer visible from the thick scrub falling back on his path, she cut across to the fence, and hidden herself by a friendly native cherry tree, she could see him as he crossed the open ground leading to the huts. She watched him gather up a few sticks and enter his hut. Soon there was a glimmer of light and a stream of smoke, and she knew that he had kindled his fire. Ellen had forgotten much that her own mother had taught her, she had long ceased to pray, except in a very desultory way,—for herself—but those words 'Our Father,' &c., she did remember, and, leaning on the fence, with streaming eyes, she repeated them now for him.

CHAPTER VII.

FROM A LADY'S BOUDOIR TO A CONVICT'S HUT.

THERE was a very pleasant room at Langville, called the 'work-room,' or 'morning-room.' It was well screened by dark venetian shutters. A fine specimen of the Lyre-bird's tail ornamented the cedar chimneypiece, and some of Kate's school flower and fruit paintings, in richly-gilt frames, relieved the white-washed walls. There was but little furniture, save some comfortable American rocking-chairs and a large table covered with work and work-baskets, at which Mrs. Lang and her daughter Kate sat busily employed.

A smaller table stood near the window, where Isabel was stationed, apparently drawing; though from the blackened scraps of paper which lay about, it seemed as if she was more intent on wasting her pencils.

'It does not signify,' said she, snapping the point she had so carefully cut, in her energy. 'I do think it is a shame, Kate!'

'I cannot help it,' exclaimed Kate, pettishly. 'I wish they would leave me alone. I am sure I don't ask them to do so. It is all very well for you, Issy; you are not so tormented as I am!'

'My dear,' remarked Mrs. Lang, soothingly; 'my dear, you are Miss Lang, you know, and of course you

will receive a great deal of attention ; and now you are both getting of an age that really it is very desirable to be careful as to whom you encourage. I always stand up for poor young Jolly ; and I shall always say he is a worthy, nice young man. But my love, Issy, your sister certainly has every right to look higher for an establishment.'

'O mamma!' laughed Isabel ; 'I am not thinking of any 'establishment.' I only contend that good old friends are not to be pouted at for the new brooms. As to matrimony, and that sort of thing, I think it is all fiddlesticks. (How lucky Miss Terry is not here !) Dear me, what a horrid pass we are come to, if we are not to speak, or laugh, or move, without reference to such a grave concern as matrimony, or an *establishment* !'

'You are very childish, Isabel,' said her mother. 'What a sad disadvantage it was, to be sure, your father's being so over-indulgent, and keeping you at home ! You never will learn Kate's manners.'

'O, well ! I am content to leave them all to Kate—so that I am not put into a strait-waistcoat, and obliged to look here and look there, and smile on one and pout on another. However, it is hard to have to do all the agreeable to the miserable neglected ones, while pretty Kate breaks their hearts.'

'Ah !' said Mrs. Lang, half laughing ; 'you may keep your own manners, Issy ; for if you are not so handsome as your sister, still I think there is something which seems to make you a favourite.'

'Certainly, no other house is so beset as ours !' said Kate, affectedly.

'Of course not, my dear love. Besides the attraction you are, ours is naturally *the* house to which

everybody would desire an introduction ; and I am sure I am always particularly happy to see friends. Issy, my dear, I hope you will put away your drawing and run your flounces. I am sure the dress will be nothing without them. Kate's looks lovely. You will look so plain by her side ; and you know, my dear, your face and figure wont bear it.'

'As to that, mamma,' interrupted Kate, 'Issy is not so very plain, except her freckles.'

'Certainly not ! Who ever said so ? Issy is a very fine young woman, to be sure !' said Mrs. Lang.

'A bouncing lassie am I,' said Isabel, with a very bright smile. 'But really, mother, you have some malicious intent. You will make Kate and me dreadfully vain if you go on so. As to the flounces—I really cannot undertake such a labour.' Here she yawned as if very tired. 'But let me have Ellen's help, and I will come out frilled to my waist. Do, my dear mammy !'

'I have said, my dear, that I think it very imprudent to have in the girl. She is only half saved or very wicked ; but however, do as you will, only don't let her annoy the other servants.'

Mrs. Lang here left the room, and presently Kate began to try on her skirt ; and while looking before and behind, and taking a few steps to see the effect, she remarked, 'I never saw any one like you, Issy, for getting your own way. If you set your heart on anything, you are sure to get it !'

Isabel smiled, but said nothing.

'What can it be to you about this poor girl ? It is sure to end in mischief, and you will have a precious deal of trouble to guide her. Every one says she is crazed !' Presently she added—'Are you finishing

the drawing of the church, or what? O! Issy, by the bye, do you know I think a certain person finds Langville very attractive.'

'A great many do, according to mamma's account,' Isabel answered.

'Ah, yes! but really and truly, I do believe that one among them is very attentive to you. Come now, don't pretend, for I am sure you know what I mean.'

'Do you mean Dr. Marsh?'

'Of course I don't.'

'Perhaps Mr. Herbert, then?' said Isabel.

'No, not Mr. Herbert. Some one else, much better than Mr. Herbert.'

'Who can it be?' said Isabel, with mock gravity.

'Mr. Farrant. He is always coming here.'

'Yes, as a clergyman. It is very natural he should visit his parishioners,' said Isabel, stooping to pick up her pencil.

'Nonsense; he doesn't go to any other house as he does here.'

'You forget this is *Langville*!' said Isabel, laughing.

'Ah, laugh away, Issy; but I am positive about it. You can't deny it. See how you are blushing.'

'I don't know what I am to deny, Kate; and of course you could make any one colour up by making such absurd faces. Pray don't fall into the White's abominable fashion of always talking of beaux and so forth. I do so detest it.'

'It is hard I mayn't have a joke, however,' said Kate, tossing her head, and pouting. 'Every one laughs at me! Besides, I am sure it is true. Mrs. Vesey said so.' And then saying she must go and remind the laundress to iron a collar for her, Kate left the room.

Isabel soon put up her drawing things, and taking up a parasol, stepped out of window. She crossed the lawn, or rather what stood for a lawn, and skirting along by the garden, took the path which led to a paddock. Crossing this, she passed through some partially cleared bush, and came to a hut inhabited by Maclean, who had rented some land of Mr. Lang, and also worked for him. A stout hard-featured woman was employed in scouring a tub in front of the hut. On seeing Isabel, she stopped, pushed back her hair, and made what was intended for a curtsy.

‘Good day, Mrs. Maclean. Where is Ellen?’

The woman laughed.

‘Ye needn’t come to me for that information. She may be where she likes, and I’ll never say another word to her,—a good-for-nothing young miss! It is hard, I consider, to get the ill-will and words I have just for trying to keep her up. She is the very plague of my life and her father’s too!’

‘It would be well if she could be employed,’ said Isabel.

‘Well, and aint there plenty for her to do if she would! She is a bad girl, miss—a bad girl.’

‘I have a little needlework which I want done. My mother says Ellen may come to the house and do it if —if——’

‘Mrs. Lang had best give it to myself. Ellen can’t nor wont work. I said to her father this morning, I would see to get her out in service in some farm where there’s hard work. She needs a tight hand.’

‘I should like to try her once more,’ remarked Isabel. ‘She needs kindness, Mrs. Maclean.’

The woman’s face darkened, as she muttered, ‘She needs a good stick : but, however, miss, if you wish to be trying her, all I can say is she’ll not be found here.’

Our hut is the last place my lady fancies,' and Mrs. Maclean, without further ceremony, turned away and occupied herself with making up the fire.

Isabel went on. A little way at the side a slip rail led to a bush paddock. She climbed the fence, and called 'Ellen' several times, but no answer came. Then Isabel turned further among the trees. A slight crackling noise in the bushes attracted her—she again called 'Ellen,' and a creeping, timid figure peeped round from a thick mass of wild currant plants, and seeing who it was presently curtsied.

'Ellen, idling here!' said Isabel, reproachfully.

'I have nothing to do.'

'Why not go home and work?'

'Home—I've no home!' Large tears stood in her eyes, as she added, quickly, 'Look here, Miss Isabel—look at my arm and my neck—see those black marks—look at this cut,' raising her yellow hair from her temple; 'that's what I get at home!'

'What is it all for, Ellen; is it that you really will not work and behave well? or——'

'No! I wont work for *her*. I have worked—but no more. It is all because I wont give up——'

'Give up what, Ellen—Lynch?'

'Yes; but that is not all. They pretend to care for that, and dear me, miss, it isn't for my character they care; only you see Venn, he is in power now; and——'

'What has Venn to do with you?'

'Nothing! and never shall! Lynch would kill him first.'

'I don't understand you, Ellen.'

'Why then, miss, Venn is always after me, and they—that is she—wants me to have him; and that's why I got these blows.'

‘And what is your objection ; there is not much difference between him and Lynch, is there, as to character ?’ Isabel was suddenly stopped by the girl’s vehement exclamation—

‘My objection ! I hate him ;—*his* character ! he is a reptile—a base, low, creeping reptile ! Miss Isabel,’ added she, coming closer, and looking into her face earnestly, ‘did ever you know what it was to love—to love one who loves you, and is scorned by all besides ? No, you never did ! You are good and kind—yes, a kind young lady—but it isn’t the fate of such as you. When you marry you will wear fine clothes, and go to church, and all will smile. You can’t understand what I say—that I would die—I would kill myself—rather than have any one but Jack Lynch. I am the only living thing except Wasp, the creature, he cares for, or that can win a smile out of his heart. He’ll never give me up—I’ll never give him up ; and he says if master—if your father, Miss Isabel, would give the leave, he’d be able to bring me to his hut for his wife, and then no power in law could keep me from him. Think of that ! O, you’ll get the leave for us, wont you ? you’ll beg it, wont you ? and then I’ll work, indeed I will !’

‘Ellen, I can do nothing for you in this matter ; but Lynch asked if I would try and get you work in our house.’

‘Did he ? O yes, he wished it, I remember. He said ’twould make me hold up my head again ; he made me promise to behave well. And you will—you are going to take me, and I shan’t be sent away up the country to her aunt, as she threatened ? O, Miss Isabel, I *will* work for you, indeed I will.’

‘Very well, Ellen. Come to me in an hour ; you

know my room ; come there. But you must be tidy, and you must obey orders ; no going out, Ellen, remember.'

'Well, just let me say the good-bye to him ; just tell him what I'm going to do, and I'll obey you. Bless you, dear Miss Isabel !'

Isabel returned to the house, pondering over Ellen's strange character, and wondering why her father would not let them marry at once. Ellen gathered up some flowers which she had been arranging according to her fancy, and singing in a clear voice, she sauntered on through the bush, keeping in a line with the fence, though not directly by it ; now looking at the birds, now crushing a gum leaf and smelling it, and sometimes stopping to kick at an ugly red ant, and talking to it as a child might, ' Ah ! wouldn't you like to have a bite at me ? Ah, but you see I have on a shoe to-day, good luck to you. Ah ! you ugly, ill-tempered looking thing !' At last the sound of a bell roused her to greater speed. She bound her long hair round and round her head, and fixed the velvet band tighter on her forehead ; then ran lightly till she came to that part of the bush which was close to the 'farm' and the men's huts.

The dinner bell still clanged shrilly through the place, and there was the sound of laughter and voices. The horse who had been turning the mill was set at liberty, while a boy pushed a load of coarse hay towards him for his refreshment. Stately, heavy oxen came from the fields, looking patient and sober, while the whips cracked over their heads, and the men hallooed and swore. The blacksmith stayed his bellows and laid aside his apron, while a few were already cutting up beef and damper.

Ellen replied not to their greetings, though a kind word and a nod was given by many ; while others winked or sneered, and then laughed loud as she hurried by. But on she went to the last hut. A white terrier jumped upon her, and she hugged and stroked him.

‘Lynch, are you there ?’

He was there—not eating or preparing his dinner, however ; but sitting on a log, with a black shade of suppressed anger on his face.

‘What, Nell ! here again ! Well, if you wont take no advice, you must take your own way, I suppose. ’Twas a dark day you first saw me, Nell !’

‘And why are you not at dinner, Jack ?’ said she, coming close to him. ‘And what ails you ? Good God ! Jack,’ added she, looking frightened, ‘what is it ? You haven’t had words again, have you ?’

‘I’m sick of words—I’m sick of life ! Whatever such a wretch as I was created for puzzles me. There’s something wrong. One man is not made to be so put upon by another.’

She sat on the floor by him, looking at him—the dog beside her.

‘Look, Nell, at the meat Venn favoured me with for a week’s rations ! look at it—tainted, and half bone !—last week the same ; but *that* I don’t mind—it is his silly spite. Ah, Nelly ! he’ll have you yet.’

She shuddered, and drew her arm through his, but said nothing.

‘He had the impudence to speak light of you this very day. He knew I would not stand *that*, so I come off short commons, you see. *He* in the store !—*he* a head servant !—the veriest, lowest knave and pilfering, lying rogue in this country ! But never

mind And then, Nell, no more coming down of evenings, my girl. I'm to move—I'm to leave this here hut, and move up with Gentleman Bill.'

'Why, Jack ?—what can that be for ?'

'Why,—Nell, do you ask ? Just because they know I like this place, and I have set a peach-tree and a few cabbages here, and knocked up a shelf, and made it somehow my own—that's 'why.' But I'm proof—I am not a going to let out. The ticket, Nelly—the ticket !—just let me get the blessed ticket !'

He looked at her as he spoke, and the bitterness seemed to pass away. His eyes were dim as he drew his hand from his head, and passed it over hers, stroking her hair. But it was soon gone, that kindly dew-drop falling on a withered plant. It was shaken off, and the lips were again tightened, and the eyes hardened.

'Lynch !' and her voice trembled ; 'Lynch, I have good news—all owing to you, Jack. What do you think ?—Miss Isabel is to have me to work for her.'

'A good thing, too. Why, now, Nell, you will hold up your head again. And mind me,' added he, 'Nell, give me up ; try to serve Miss Isabel, and you'll get on, mayhap ; and don't be after thinking of me, Nell. Bad as I am, I don't wish you to be dragged to misery through me.'

'Would *you* give me up, Jack ?'

'No, and that I wouldn't, save for your good. I have known you since you were a child, and I never knew you bad—never unkind—only put upon ; and sorely used You've the softest, the kindest eye was ever made, I believe.'

'And you have for me, Lynch,' sobbed Ellen. 'Never say that again. I will never give you up.'

You've been father and mother and friend to me. I'll work ; and Miss Isabel will get the ticket, and then I'll come to you and live here with you, and then you'll never have the dark look.'

Her voice was drowned at last by sobs and tears—her head fell on his knee.

The rough, hard man would have blessed her, would have prayed for her, but he didn't know how. Evil passions were even then at work within him ; yet, bad as he was, there was one soft spot, one point in his heart which could be touched. Harshness irritated and goaded him, but kindness and forbearance—even pity—had power.

Insulting words had passed from Venn a few hours before—words of scorn against Ellen—mixed with triumphant mockery—that if *he* chose he could marry the girl directly, in spite of Lynch. Lynch answered. Venn had power, and he used it. He could pick out the worst meat, the worst tea, and give short measure. He was, in truth, jealous of Lynch with regard to Ellen. Venn was, as Mr. Herbert had said, 'a great villain ;' but his wickedness lay in cunning and swindling, and for self-interest he could smooth his brow and smile, and speak fair words to any one. He was clever. Though he had cheated his master over and over again, he had kept out of punishment ; and partly through a wish to turn the cunning for instead of against himself, and partly because Venn was so very good an accountant, and had a respectful manner, Mr. Lang had promoted him. He did not trust him, but he made it worth his while to save his pocket, though sometimes it might be at the expense of the other men.

Venn knew how to hint at the triangle and forty

lashes—a disgrace he had escaped—a disgrace which acted like bitter poison on Lynch, and turned even his better feelings to gall. Venn joked about it as he weighed out rations, and asked when the ticket was to come ; and he followed Ellen, found out her favourite haunts, flattered her, and even threatened her. All this made dark work in Lynch's bosom. It seemed as if it was only Ellen's love which kept the bitter thoughts of revenge and despair from finding a vent. But the ticket !—a few months or weeks more, and it must be his—and he could marry, and work where he liked ; and Ellen—she would be taken from an unhappy home—she would be cherished—ah ! as much as if she were the first lady in the land. He was strong and able—what more would they need ? food and firing, and all that was necessary for clothing would be theirs. What a tidy, convenient hut he would build for her, with flowers about it ! no matter where—the more lone the better for them both : she would sing like a bird ! People should see that a convict's wife could be happy and cared for !

These were his dreams by night and his thoughts by day, in his brighter moments. They beckoned him on, and sustained him. He bid her often leave him, and give him up, and implored her to go away home, and not 'bring scandal and talk on herself.' Yet if she failed to come, he would wander about the Bush, after work, to see what was become of her, and watch for hours outside her father's hut, and listen, to know if she were there.

It was a great relief to him to think of her having work at Langville ; and with this one comfort he turned more easily from his own grievances.

CHAPTER VIII.

'THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PANTRY.'

MRS. LANG was in her store-room on the morning when the party was expected, dispensing flour and sugar, butter and eggs, and other necessaries, and giving directions to her servant. She told Isabel to make haste and come to her ; and 'Kate, you go to the drawing-room to receive the Veseys, and tell Miss Terry to have the children dressed and the school-room tidy.'

Isabel was now actively employed in making pastry, and Kate having exchanged her riding-dress for a white gown, took out her worsted work and awaited the arrival of the Veseys.

Presently Mr. Lang came into the store.

'Well, then, what now ? I tell you, my dear, if you have custards, get Miss Terry to make 'em ; she's more successful than you are, a great deal.'

'You bad better get Miss Terry to be housekeeper then, Mr. Lang, or your wife, perhaps ; for really you seem to prefer her to everybody !'

'She's a good little soul, anyhow, Mrs. Lang, so don't be jealous, my dear ; but she wont ride, and how are we to get her to Sugarloaf to-morrow ?'

'Why, if she wont ride (such nonsense and folly !) she can stay at home ; indeed, I think she is wanted to mind the little ones.'

‘She shall do no such thing, if I drive her myself, Mrs. Lang! She shall go. Why, who is to sing, I should like to know, if she don’t go?’

‘O, very well, Mr. Lang, certainly,’ said his wife, bridling up. ‘You may drive her instead of me; no doubt you prefer it; I will stay at home.’

‘Nonsense,’ muttered Mr. Lang, looking angry.

‘There is no sort of occasion for any one to stay at home,’ said Isabel; ‘we have asked the Herberts to bring their spring-cart; Miss Terry can go in that, and either Mr. Herbert can drive, or I’ll drive her myself, and you and mamma can go in the old gig with quiet Peggy, who will pull you out of all the bogs.’

‘That’ll do, Issy; you’ve a head for managing these things, I see,’ said her father. ‘So, then, the Herberts are coming—well, well—provide plenty of prog, d’ye hear? and put up some of the cherry brandy, and we’ll make hay while the sun shines, for how long we shall be above water I don’t know. Ruin! ruin! Such times!’ and muttering these last words he left the room.

‘What can he mean?’ said his wife. ‘Dear! how he delights to terrify me! we are not going to ruin, I hope. Has there been any news of the bank to-day, Issy, my dear?’

Issy did not know; but she had heard the overseer say that only ten out of fifty fat bullocks had been sold, and unless they were sent to be boiled down, they might stay and eat away all the grass for many a long month.

Mrs. Lang shook her head and said—

‘To be sure, the times are dreadful! but the bank—the bank is the worst of all! Nobody knows whether everything belonging to them may not be seized. I

have been persuading your father to take the boys from school and get a tutor for them ; one can be had for 30*l.* or 40*l.* a year, or less than that, and it would save a good deal ; and, after all, what's the use of so much Latin and Greek ? If they learn to keep accounts and write a good hand, they will be better off than poring over dead languages that no one speaks or understands except disagreeable people, like Mr. Herbert.'

'And Mr. Farrant,' Isabel remarked.

'Yes, my dear, Mr. Farrant ; but he'd be all the better, to my thinking, if he was less peculiar ; Latin and Greek have given him odd notions ; he'll never be a man to do well for himself ; he can't live upon poetry or Latin, though really I believe he expects us to live on precious little, he talks so much about giving money for this and that, as if four walls wasn't every way as good for worship as useless pillars and all that carving of ugly faces about them. Aye, aye, depend upon it, Issy, my dear, Latin don't make a good farmer nor a good husband, my dear.'

Isabel did not answer ; she was intent on ornamenting the rim of a tart, and her mother soon left her.

The Vesey's had arrived. The gentlemen went to look at the horses, and Mrs. Vesey remained in the drawing-room with Kate.

Mrs. Vesey had come with her husband to New South Wales to make a fortune, laugh at everything, to be admired, as a lady of fashion, and do as she liked.

Clever caricatures were drawn of scenes at Langville, and humorous verses were scribbled cutting up every one, of course. Selections of these had been shown to Miss Lang, who thought them very charming and clever. Kate had already remodelled her dresses and

collars after Mrs. Vesey’s fashion, and had begun a chair-cover like the one at Vine Lodge.

Mrs. Vesey paid great attention to Kate, admired her eyes and hair, and whispered in confidence what she thought of the people in the district.

And now, tired with the heat, Mrs. Vesey threw herself on the sofa, saying—

‘There now, Miss Lang, my dear creature, sit in front of me, and I shall see you ; it is really a treat in this part of the world to see a pretty face ! I beg pardon, but really this is not a becoming climate. I must try and recover myself before your worthy mother comes. Pray say nothing of my being here ; let us enjoy each other for an hour ; where is your sister ? O ! making pastry ; well, a very creditable, respectable occupation ; and does Mrs. Lang cook the dinner ? O ! I beg pardon, but I thought it was a colonial fashion, and very primitive ; our great grandmothers must have been dear creatures with their keys and receipt-books. I mean to be quite Mrs. Notable myself ; I assure you I have serious thoughts of milking the cows ! O, it is killingly hot, but this is a palace of a room—only pardon me, a fright of a carpet—Sydney, I suppose—I must tell your father where to send for one in London.’

‘Does your head ache ?’ asked Kate, seeing her hold her temples.

‘O, my dear, I am subject to dreadful headaches. I am quite a martyr to them ! Perhaps you will be so delightfully goodnatured as to fan me a little, for the flies are very annoying.’

Kate was but too happy to be so employed ; she took a screen, and whilst fanning her friend, they talked of to-morrow’s excursion.

‘The Herberts, you say. Well, I am glad of that ; the old spinster is such fun, and he, too, with his long chin ; and who else is to be here ?’

‘The Budds and the Jollys. . . ’

‘Ah ! the Jollys, and Mr. Tom, of course. Don’t blush ; though, by the bye, it is remarkably becoming. I did hear, how I wont say—perhaps my cockatoo told me, for he is very chatty—I did hear it whispered that this young Mr. Jolly blushed, not like you, Kate, but as red as a peony when a certain young lady’s name was mentioned ; but I hate a man who blushes. He is all very well, I dare say—a capital stock-man, but’

The gentlemen coming in put a stop to the conversation. Mr. Fitz insisted on relieving Miss Lang—he would fan both ladies. ‘By the bye, Miss Lang, who is that uncommonly pretty girl on your farm ?’ he said.

‘I don’t know who you mean, unless you call Ellen pretty. I never knew she was a beauty,’ said Kate.

‘The girl I mean has hair like gold and eyes like—I hardly know what they are like. She is small, and neat, without a cap, we saw her down at those huts by the mill.’

‘It must be Ellen. She is the daughter of one of our men. Her father is very angry with her because she wants to marry a convict.’

‘O here is Mrs. Lang !’ said Mrs. Vesey, jumping up and nearly upsetting a small table which stood near. ‘So very glad to see you, my dear Mrs. Lang. Hope you haven’t hurried away from your household business, I am sure. I am afraid you have been getting all sorts of nice things for us. Now, I don’t care a straw what I eat !’

To all this Mrs. Lang replied by a stiff and constrained curtsy, and trying at the same time to fall into Mrs. Vesey's 'easy way.' She was soon followed by Isabel, in her white dress, and her hair smoothly braided, smiling, yet receiving her visitors with a certain air of dignity which silenced Mrs. Vesey for a moment.

Presently, however, she whispered to Kate, 'My dear Miss Lang, do prevail on your sister to try milk of roses, or something, to get rid of those dreadful freckles. She is so awfully burnt and disfigured.'

Kate blushed as she said, 'Issy did not mind; she always ran out in the sun without a bonnet.'

Dinner was announced, and Mrs. Vesey praised the mutton, and Mr. Lang talked of his numerous flocks and herds, and what wages shepherds ought to get. Then Mrs. Vesey fell in love with a pumpkin pudding, which she declared she must take a lesson how to make from the cook, if Mrs. Lang would allow her. Mrs. Lang coloured and fidgeted, and said she should be most happy to show Mrs. Vesey anything; but Isabel laughed, and said she doubted if the cook knew much about it.

'Issy always makes the puddings,' said Mr. Lang. 'Issy and Miss Terry are capital hands at that sort of thing. Miss Terry's custards, Mrs. Vesey, are the very best——'

'Pray, Mr. Lang, don't talk about custards; I dare say Mrs. Vesey is not very much interested in custards,' said Mrs. Lang.

But Mr. Lang had got upon his favourite theme, and one which irritated his better-half, to his great amusement; and Mrs. Vesey protested that custard

was the very thing she liked best in the world. Delicious custards! Would Miss Terry be so very obliging as to make some, and let her see the process?

Mr. Fitz, too, said he should certainly come and be initiated in the art of custard-making; it would be capital fun to beat eggs.

‘Don’t you think, Miss Lang (turning to Kate), it is a beautiful sight to see the froth rising and rising? Besides, I have always understood there is quite an art in doing it—a stiff elbow, isn’t it?’

Kate laughed at his eagerness, and more still when he took up a fork and began to imitate the action. But Mrs. Lang was uneasy, and had a sort of suspicion that they were laughing at her; so she hurried over the dessert, proposing a turn in the verandah.

‘Did you ever see a burning off?’ said Isabel to Mrs. Vesey.

‘O, dear, no!—never—I should like it of all things!’

‘We can easily go, then; for about a quarter of a mile away they are burning off a large paddock.’

The gentlemen heard the proposition, and seconded the resolution, though Mrs. Lang could not think why Issy had proposed such a thing; ‘as if it was not pleasanter to walk round the cultivation!’

‘What is that?’ said Mrs. Vesey.

‘O, don’t you know that we Bush folks are prouder of a bit of cultivation—cultivated, cleared land—than of all the forest and wild country in the world,’ said Isabel.

‘It is not an unnatural feeling,’ said Mr. Farrant. ‘What has cost us trouble generally possesses an interest in our eyes.’

‘And yet I think I never could cut down a fine tree without a pang,’ said Miss Terry.

‘O, yes, you would, in the wholesale way in which the Bush is cleared, Miss Terry ; it is not like the magnificent single trees you talk of in England. Come to-night, and see if you wont lend your aid with hearty good-will to burn the fallen wood,’ said Isabel. ‘But do, Kate, let us wait for the Herberts ; Mr. Herbert is such a famous hand at making a bonfire, and when it is darker it looks so much better.’

‘No, Issy, don’t wait for them. I’m sure we are more at ease without Mr. Herbert,’ said Kate.

‘Why, surely you are not afraid of the grand signor Herbert, are you?’ said Mrs. Vesey. ‘He is the greatest fun possible. It excites one’s wits when he is present ; for you either get such a dark frown or such a smile.’

‘Or such a contemptuous look,’ interrupted Kate.

‘To be sure, that is just it. There is nothing common about him ; he is just the man to bring to your feet, my dear.’

‘Not very easily, I should think,’ said Kate.

‘Come ; you shall see how I make him talk. You are not half up to fun, Kate ; but do come here, and pick me that rose for my brooch, and I’ve something to whisper to you, fairest of the fair.’ So saying she sprang off the verandah, which was raised by a green bank, and Kate followed her to a part of the house which had a creeping rose trained on it.

Mr. Farrant said he was going to visit a sick person on the farm, but would join them at the fire. The other gentlemen were still in the dining-room. Mrs. Lang and Isabel sat in the verandah, while Miss Terry went to see her pupils—the two youngest girls of the family.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BURNING OFF.

JUST as the party left the house for their walk, Mr. and Miss Herbert rode up to the front door, followed by a servant driving the spring-cart Isabel had asked for. Miss Herbert went in to take off her habit, but her brother joined the others to see the 'burning off.'

Mrs. Vesey placed herself near Mr. Herbert, looking as if she expected him to offer her an arm. This, however, he did not do, and his face gradually gathered into a sarcastic expression, as the lady ran on in a light, clever strain about new operas, books, and improvements in England.

'Really it is a pleasure to meet with some creature here who is not wholly crammed with bullocks and sheep ; some one who can talk and take an interest in literary matters.'

'I am sorry to say, madam, you have fixed on a very wrong person. I have been many years a settler, my principal study is how to cure the scab in sheep ; if you can enlighten me, I shall be grateful.'

'Dear me, how horrible ! I wonder we don't all get wool growing on us here ; we shall certainly be turned into legs of mutton ; the burden of the song is sheep ! sheep ! sheep !'

‘Well, take care, Mrs. Vesey,’ said Isabel, ‘that you are not kidnapped for boiling down.’

Mrs. Vesey laughed, ‘Ha, I am hardly fat enough for that purpose ; but really, Mr. Herbert, seriously now, don’t you, as an unprejudiced man—now don’t you think a Bush life dreadful ; so lowering, all the little elegances of life gone, and one’s manners growing rusty and colonial. I am sure I shall soon find myself covered in wool, and making butter, and scolding convicts, a regular bush-woman—and wont it be dreadful ?’

‘My opinion is,’ said Mr. Herbert, drily, ‘that a vulgar person will be equally so, whether in the gay world or in the Bush. It is not making butter or playing waltzes that makes the difference. I am proud to say I have met with as graceful, gracious women in this country as in any other—women who, not being slaves to the many absurd conventional customs of English society, are not ashamed of their household duties, and exercise hospitality and goodness without fashion or show.’

Mrs. Vesey made no answer, but lifted her glass to her eye and glanced round slyly at the party. There was a smile playing round her mouth, as her eyes finally rested on Mrs. Lang, who was toiling along by the side of Mr. Vesey, in her flounces. Isabel’s eyes also rested there, and met Mrs. Vesey’s, and then came a deep blush, which only increased when Mrs. Vesey laughed and said, ‘Come, Miss Isabel Lang, why don’t you return thanks for the eloquent defence Mr. Herbert has made. I am sure if I were a Bush lady I——’

‘Come along—come along,’ now shouted Willie and Jem, as they rushed by, and the cry was repeated by

the gentlemen. They quickened their pace, and soon reached the spot. There lay the tall trees with leaves yet green on them—cut down in their prime or their early youth—the old dry trunk and the tender sapling alike laid low ; and there were the heaps which the men had built up and were already setting fire to. The moon was up, and the sun looked red through the thick mass of dark iron-bark trees in the distance. There was the music of the evening breeze as it played on the spiral leaves of the swamp oak, and there was the crackling of the fire louder and louder, and the shouts of men as they called to each other.

It was an animated scene, and every one entered into it with spirit. Every one—even Mrs. Lang took up sticks or dry grass to throw on the piles—every one, but Mr. Herbert, who, leaning against a tree, seemed to enjoy looking on. Isabel, with her father and brothers, was the most active in piling up faggots. She ran to a burning heap and seized a fire stick to apply to the pile they had raised. As she ran through the air the stick blazed up. The boys clapped their hands and cried, ‘Run, Issy ! run !’ and swift as the wind she flew and threw it triumphantly on the heap just in time to save her hand from being burnt.

‘More sticks, Willie ! run for more,’ cried Isabel, ‘and this pile will beat all the others.’

Mr. Herbert darted forward, and threw sticks and dry leaves ; and Mr. Lang dragged a large branch, which they threw on it. Then, indeed, it burst forth in grand style—curling and crackling, and waving its long tongues of flame, throwing a strong glare on the eager and excited faces which stood around.

Several acres were now burning. It was a striking

and a peculiar sight—the fires, the pale moon, with the tall, gaunt, white gum-trees and dingy iron barks in the distance, standing out in strong relief against the sky; and the group of young people, jumping to and fro; Isabel—still the busiest of all—here, there, and everywhere.

‘That’ll do?’ said Mr. Lang, rubbing his hands.

‘I say, Herbert, this will yield me many a good crop, I hope—but, ’pon my honour, this heat is no joke;’ and he walked away.

Mr. Vesey was talking to one of the men, and learning the best way of clearing land. Mr. Fitz was talking to Kate, who had found a seat on a stump, and said she was tired of the fires. Presently they were all startled by a loud report, which was echoed round and round the bush, and caused a fluttering among those birds which had taken their places for roosting.

‘Ah!—it’s down!—capital!’ said Willie. ‘Lynch has been at that big tree all day; and he made a bet he’d have it down to-night. He’s a first-rate hand at felling wood, Lynch is.’

Mr. Herbert, followed by the boys, went up to the spot where the tree had fallen. The man smiled as they praised his work, and touched his hat respectfully to Mr. Herbert.

Mr. Herbert gave the man something by way of encouragement for his manly feat.

‘Thank your honour—good evening, sir.’

Mr. Herbert saw some of the party preparing to go: it was Mr. Fitz, who offered his arm to Kate, and Mr. Vesey and Mrs. Lang. The others still lingered.

‘O, don’t go, Issy,’ said her brothers; ‘stay till the moon is bright, and till that large heap is burnt.’

Isabel was quite willing, and Mrs. Vesey said she should like to stay too, it was such a beautiful evening, and such a pity to be shut up in a room.

‘Who is that?’ said Isabel. ‘O, Miss Terry, I am glad you are come.’

‘And here’s Mr. Farrant,’ said Mrs. Vesey.

‘Yes,’ said he, coming up to them ; ‘I found this lady in the Vine Walk, and persuaded her to come and meet you. Dear me, this is really grand—look!’ said he, turning to Miss Terry, ‘look at that hollow tree, red hot to the very top, every branch, every leaf made of fire. How strikingly beautiful it is, seen against that mass of dark bush.’

‘What is it?’ said Mrs. Vesey.

‘One of the men have fired a hollow tree,’ said Isabel ; ‘we have had such dry weather that it burns like tinder—see, it will fall presently ; it totters now.’ And in a few moments was heard the crash of the fallen giant echoing round the bush.

The men were now resting from their work and lighting their pipes. Some returned home, others remained to watch lest the fire should catch the fence.

‘There is no illumination that I ever saw like this,’ said Mr. Farrant.

They stood looking at it for some little time longer, and then Isabel said—

‘Really we must go home ; tea will be waiting.’

‘Will you take my arm after all your labours?’ said Mr. Farrant.

They proceeded at a brisk pace, the others following.

‘Come, Mr. Herbert,’ said Willie, ‘we are going.’

But Mr. Herbert did not move.

‘Who is that behind those bushes?’ said Mrs. Vesey,

when they had walked on about ten minutes. 'Suppose it should be a bushranger.'

'Bushrangers don't go about at night,' said Miss Terry.

'O, it is only Pat, going to shoot opossums,' cried Willie; 'he always goes out on a moonlight night. He feeds his dogs on them, and he dries the skins to make himself a rug. He kills a dozen or more of a night sometimes; look! there goes one, hush!'

They looked up and saw an opossum with its sharp nose jumping from branch to branch on a tall tree close to the path. The dog that was following set up a loud baying, and in vain tried to climb the tree. Willie and Jem pelted the poor little thing with stones and sticks, though they were entreated not to do so by Mrs. Vesey, and after they had walked on they heard him hallooing, 'I've got him down! now Rover for your supper, my boy!'

It turned out, however, to be a flying squirrel, so Rover was forced to have patience and lick his large jaws, for Willie, thinking Mrs. Vesey had never seen one, carried it by its hind legs for her inspection. The beautiful soft fur, and the peculiar formation of the animal, from which it derives its name of 'flying,' was duly admired.

A cloud now overshadowed the moon, and it was rather dark. Mrs. Vesey and Miss Terry hurried on and found Mr. Farrant and Isabel standing on the verandah. He was repeating some lines from the *Ancient Mariner*, Isabel listening. The rest of the party passed in, impatient for tea, Mrs. Vesey saying, as she took the chair Mr. Lang placed for her, 'There is Mr. Farrant spouting poetry for the young ladies, and we left Mr. Herbert composing

a sonnet to the moon, or to himself, I don't know which.'

Miss Herbert stepped out into the verandah, and she had not been there a minute before her brother also came.

'John, why are you so late? Come, I want to know how we are to go to-morrow; are you going to drive Miss Terry, or how?'

'I am quite indifferent, I am sure; just as you please,' was the answer.

'Well, then, I hope you will ride and keep by me, for there will be a deal of scampering and racing I know, as there always is with the Langs; it doesn't suit me at all. You must keep by me, John.'

'Yes, I'll be your saddle beau, Mary. Mr. Farrant and Mr. Fitz will be more acceptable companions to the young ladies.'

Miss Herbert looked at him and said, 'Why, what's the matter? You are very grumpy to-night, John.' And they both went into the drawing-room.

Kate was sitting on a low stool by Mrs. Vesey, and behind them was Mr. Fitz, talking gaily. Mrs. Lang was growing hot in pouring out tea and complaining of her servants to Mr. Vesey, who, like many other new comers, in his heart attributed all the fault to want of good management, and explained the system he and Mrs. Vesey intended to act upon; to all of which Mrs. Lang replied—

'Ah! sir, you don't know what they are!'

Mr. Lang was cutting up cake for his boys, and Miss Herbert was trying to hear what Captain Smith, who had joined the party, was saying about a notorious bushranger he had been hunting without success. Mr.

Herbert stood leaning against the chimney-piece, with his hands behind him.

When tea was finished, music was proposed. Kate declined playing, pleading fatigue, so Isabel sat down at the instrument, and playing an old air, nodded to Mr. Herbert, and said: 'Your favourite!' Mr. Herbert did not speak, and after playing it two or three times, she asked Mrs. Vesey if she would take her place; but Mrs. Vesey said she must make her brother sing a certain comic song, which, accordingly, after the proper degree of hesitation, he did, and every one laughed, Mr. Lang loudest of all; he rubbed his hands and cried Capital, capital! beautiful, and encore, and the ladies begged hard for another. Isabel half moved a chair towards Mr. Herbert, and said, 'You are tired.'

'Not at all, I am obliged to you,' with a stiff bow; but on glancing at her, and seeing that flushed cheeks and a look of uneasiness, he moved a little, and stood leaning over the back of the proffered chair, instead of the chimney-piece, but he did not speak. Then Mr. Farrant came up and asked Mr. Herbert's opinion of some letters which had appeared in the *Sydney Herald* suggesting a new way of fattening pigs, and by degrees Mr. Herbert was led into an animated conversation. The pigs led to a place in South America, where the people kill these animals merely for their fat, and find it a profitable trade. South America led to a voyage Mr. Herbert once made when a lad, in which his ship had chased some pirates, and before long every voice in the room was hushed, and the two boys had crept up behind Isabel's chair, listening with breathless attention to his vivid and forcible description of the chase.

When the story was ended, there was a general move for bed. Mrs. Vesey expressed her wonder how room could be found for so many. She had not been long enough in the country to know what indian-rubber houses the hospitable settlers have, how they stretch them out, and turn drawing-room sofas, and even dining-tables into beds !

‘Call me, my dear girl,’ said she to Kate ; ‘call me early, or I shall never wake to-morrow !’

‘O, don’t be afraid of that. No one ever gets any sleep in this house after four. Papa wears creaking shoes, and goes up and down the passage knocking and hallooing till every one is up.’

‘Another of the Bush fashions ! Well, I hope you’ll teach my brother Arthur to rise early ; he seldom gets up till ten, he is a lazy fellow.’

Kate blushed as she said good night. Mr. Herbert held the door open for the ladies to pass out ; Miss Herbert and Isabel were the last. He kissed his sister according to their usual custom, and instead of letting Isabel pass with the bow which had been bestowed on the others, he held out his hand ; ‘Isabel . . . good night !’ he said. But she read the meaning of the pause in his face. She knew he was aware of, and sorry for, his want of temper, and somehow she never liked her friend better than when he stooped to confess himself wrong. She cordially returned his handshake, and forthwith paid great and minute attention to Miss Herbert’s comforts in her room.

CHAPTER X.

HOW THEY RIDE IN AUSTRALIA.

MR. and Mrs. Lang and their daughter Isabel, were up almost as soon as the sun, packing away chicken pies, tongue, cold beef, and other good things for the pic-nic. Kate made the breakfast, assisted by Mr. Fitz, who contrived that morning to be down three hours before his usual time. Before they all assembled at the table, Mr. Herbert walked into the stockyard and stables to see that his horses were taken care of. Mr. Herbert was particular about this; his and his sister's riding horses, contrary to the general custom of the colony, were well groomed and well fed. Willie Lang was admiring them, and wishing that his father would allow him to do the same. The stockman now drove in a mob of horses, and selecting those which were wanted, turned the rest out again.

'Which horse is your sister going to ride?' said Mr. Herbert to Willie.

'Kate rides Bessie; and Isabel—I don't know which Issy will ride—she talked of driving Miss Terry.'

'Put the side-saddle on my filly, and let me have one of the ponies,' said Mr. Herbert to the man.

'That'll be a poor exchange, sir,' said he, with a grin. 'Miss Isabel's horse has a queer trick of his

own in pulling hard, besides now and then liking a buckjump ; but Miss Isabel's used to him, and knows how to manage him better than any one else.'

Willie ran in to tell his sister what a treat was in store for her, to ride Pearl all the way ! ' And she's a beauty to jump ! Wont we have leaping in fine style over the middle paddock, where the fallen trees are, that's all !'

The difficulty now was as to who should drive Miss Terry. Mr. Lang said he would, which made his wife very angry, and declare she would not go at all ; and Isabel said he really must drive Peggy in the gig, for no one else knew how to take her through the bogs. Mr. Farrant said he always liked driving better than riding, he should be most happy to do it. Mrs. Lang said ' It was too bad to make such a fuss, why couldn't Miss Terry ride. Some people liked to be important ; at all events Willie or Jem could drive her by turns.'

Mr. Farrant however persisted in preferring it, and it was settled accordingly, and some one remarked that no doubt old Mr. Jolly would be glad to change with him when he was tired.

Fortunately, Miss Terry was not present to hear all the difficulties, and when the children called her she found Mr. Farrant already seated in the cart with his whip in his hand. Isabel handed her in. She was surprised, for she had expected Willie or Jem would take it by turns, but the order to start from Mr. Lang prevented any further explanations. The gig and cart started first, and then followed the equestrians. Isabel on Pearl, who was prancing and curvetting and tossing her head, looking like the queen of the party. Kate and Mrs. Vesey set off at once in a canter, which

made Miss Herbert withdraw her foot from the stirrup just as she was in the act of mounting, and say—

‘If this is the way they are going to begin, I won’t go. We shall all break our necks.’

Mr. Herbert had to lead her horse to the slip rail, and afterwards kept by her side.

‘I think I shall propose an exchange with Mr. Farrant, by and bye,’ he said.

Miss Herbert looked pleased, but said nothing.

‘I wish to have a little talk with Miss Terry. I admired her quiet way of managing the children and taking her seat in the cart without fuss or nonsense.’

‘Quite the gentlewoman indeed, John. I should like to invite her to spend a day with us, only what should we do with the children?’

‘By all means, invite her and all the young ones. The two Miss Langs and myself can go out and make the long talked-of sketch of my mill.’

‘Pray don’t ask so many; I wanted a quiet, cosy talk with poor little Miss Terry. I am sure she needs a little sympathy. I wonder what induced her to take such a situation. I heard some one say that she did not like her brother-in-law; but evidently it is pain and misery to her to be with——’

‘Mr. Herbert—Mr. Herbert! we are going to try this fence,’ called out the boys. ‘Issy’s pony is sure to clear it—only put her well at it, give a loose rein, and don’t touch her with the spur, or she’ll buck-jump.’

‘Don’t be afraid, Miss Herbert,’ said Isabel, riding back to her as Mr. Herbert cantered on.

‘Afraid! Who can help it with such—such extraordinary people as you all are? Really it is the very last expedition of the kind I will ever be tempted to

join. Really, my brother should know better than to be such a boy.'

The two lower rails of the colonial gate—usually called a 'slip rail'—being cleared by all the gentlemen, Willie shouted out for his sisters to try. Kate declined, although pressed by Mr. Fitz. Isabel looked at her horse. 'Don't try,' called out Mr. Herbert; 'she is not a pleasant jumper yet.' 'Yes, do, Issy,' shouted the boys.

'It is not ladylike or feminine,' remarked Miss Herbert. 'You should not ask your sister to do such a colonial thing.'

'Colonial!' said Isabel. 'Oh! if it is colonial I certainly will do it. I am not ashamed to acknowledge myself colonial; so now, Pearl, gently!'

'Well done! well cleared, Issy—capital, shouted Willie and Jem and Mr. Fitz, while Kate seriously thought of following her sister's example, but before she had time to do so, Mr. Herbert had dismounted and was taking out the long heavy rails to allow the sober riders to go through.

'Pearl is not a bad jumper, Mr. Herbert,' remarked Isabel, as she patted her steed's neck.

'If you were my daughter—my sister,' Mr. Herbert said, sharply, while putting up the rails again, 'you should not do that a second time.'

'But I am not—I am not! and never shall be, luckily,' she answered, laughing, and putting Pearl into a canter.

Mr. Herbert followed in a slow walk, and did not overtake them till all the party assembled before Mr. Jolly's farm. Old Mr. Jolly was, as he said, in his 'dishabil,' superintending the salting a bullock which had been cut up that morning. Three or four men with rough gloves were rubbing the pieces of beef,

another was packing it tight into a cask, and Mr. Jolly himself occasionally waved a branch of gumtree to keep off the large yellow bottle flies which swarmed around.

‘Hallo!’ he hallooed. ‘Didn’t expect ye yet—and there is my wife and myself as busy as bees. Must be done, you know, youngers—business must be minded. Will ye wait in the parlour or go on, and we’ll overtake you? Where is Mrs. Jolly, d’ye ask? Bless you, she’s in the kitchen, I suppose—never was such a careful woman as she is—not a scrap goes to waste. Such soup from the shins—’twould surprise you!’

Here Mrs. Jolly peeped out of the kitchen window, smiling in the most good-humoured way, and holding up a piece of beefsteak.

‘Have you all breakfasted? O, then, Mr. Jolly, we must make haste and not keep them waiting; or suppose, my dear,’ added she, coming out into the yard, and touching her husband’s sleeve with her arm, ‘suppose they go on and we can follow. Tom is so busy to-day,’ said she, turning to Isabel; ‘so disappointed, my dear; but a man has just arrived about the bullocks, so he must stay. He is so sorry and vexed; for he says he has seen nothing of you for such a time; and Amelia has gone to visit her uncle. However, my dear, we have a beau for you—a great acquisition—young Mr. Henley, from England—looking about him, you know; and my husband, having once known his father, invited him up here, just you know to see what a settler’s life is. Ah! how d’ye do, Mrs. Vesey, ma’am? I’m glad to see you. Excuse me, for this is a busy day;’ and she laughed again as she pointed to her curl-papers.

Mrs. Vesey looked through her glass and let her

horse take a bite of some green barley which a man had just been cutting, and which stood in a wheel-barrow near.

‘How very pretty!’ said she, ‘quite rural; I admire the colonial taste so much, Mrs. Jolly, in always having the entrance to their houses at the back. No show off, but so primitive and simple-minded of them.’

Mrs. Jolly smiled, and said ‘Indeed!’ not understanding or hearing it all; while her husband went close up to Isabel, and holding Pearl’s silky mane, said in a confidential, important voice—‘Issy, Henley is the son of an old friend of mine—an old schoolfellow—beat me always at dead languages. A fine young man—just arrived with a snug little purse. Wants advice. Told him to have patience and look about with both eyes wide open; but he is of an impatient age you see. Wants to be settled all of a hurry. Can’t ride a bit, my dear—all new to him. Don’t be too hard upon him, hey? I have had in old Music, you know, the quietest creature ever was, but there are nasty bogs about. Fine-grown young man—see, here he is, bowing to Mrs. Vesey. On my word, he beats our Tom in his bow, whatever he may do at a leap.’ Pearl did not approve of Mr. Jolly’s grasp, which tightened in his eagerness to fix Isabel’s attention—she pranced and fidgeted; Isabel promised to be very attentive to the young stranger, and Mr. Jolly waddled off to equip for his drive.

Meanwhile Mr. Herbert had persuaded Mr. Farrant to allow him to drive the spring-cart for the rest of the way. At first he was abrupt and grave, and made short answers to little Miss Terry’s attempts at conversation; but it seemed at last that the ice was broken. They were in eager, animated talk, and Miss

Herbert remarked to her companion, Mr. Farrant, that she was glad to see her brother agreed with herself in finding that nice little creature agreeable.

‘Where is Miss Isabel Lang?’ said Mr. Farrant, looking back.

‘Oh, with that strange gentleman, depend on it. The Langs always court strangers. Ah, you have not lived here long enough to know them!’

Miss Herbert was right. Isabel was waiting for Mr. Henley to mount. ‘Music,’ a long-backed, narrow-faced horse, was led out. Mr. Henley said he knew nothing whatever of riding, but made a spring which startled Music.

‘Stick fast, I suppose,’ said he, gaily.

‘My dear fellow, don’t lay into her with that stick,’ exclaimed Mr. Jolly, as he came out tying on a black handkerchief. ‘She has plenty of spirit, and will want a curb more than a stick. Ah, there’s Dr. Marsh, I declare! Well, sir, glad to see ye. My wife and I are coming directly; go on, sir, pray.’

‘Upon my word, Mr. Jolly,’ said the Doctor, a stout little roundabout man, ‘I think I shall do better to keep with your gig. An old navy surgeon like myself cannot ride like those young Bush men and women. Just look at them, already,’ he added, lifting himself in his stirrups, and pointing with his whip. ‘There they are, jumping and scampering; really, upon my word, Miss Isabel, yours is a spirited nag. Ha—well—gently, gently, if you please; gently . . .’

The Doctor’s horse was eager to go, whatever he might be, and he was obliged to follow Isabel; and very soon the three overtook the others in the long flat paddock which almost surrounded the farm. On they went—the very numbers adding excitement and

speed—Kate and Mr. Fitz, Isabel and her brothers, Mr. Henley and the Doctor, on they went—till another slip rail checked them.

‘Jump it,’ hallooed out Willie Lang. ‘Come, Kate, show what you can do ; loosen your rein. Tippoo will do it, and no fear !—that’s right !’

‘I think you and I, my good sir, had better wait till those adventurous people get a-head a little. Gently, gently, Sultan, my good fellow ; on my word I don’t admire this. Slip rails, Mr. Henley, are one of the pests of the colony ; don’t attempt it, my good sir ! that horse can’t do it !’ said the Doctor, nervously, and applying his pocket-handkerchief to his forehead, while he endeavoured to soothe his horse’s eagerness. Mrs. Vesey was over—then her husband.

‘Now for it !’ said Mr. Henley, and he recklessly applied the stick, and notwithstanding a considerable swerve in the saddle, got safely over. The prudent doctor, after coaxing and patting Sultan into something like a state of resignation to his hard fate, dismounted, and proceeded carefully to take out the rails.

‘You are very gallant, doctor,’ said Mr. Farrant, as he and Miss Herbert passed through. The Doctor bowed and shifted his spectacles as he saw Miss Herbert—remarking that it was a hot day for riding hard. The spring-cart now came up, and the Doctor having remounted, trotted alongside, telling Miss Terry how the Miss Langs had ridden, and that they were very ‘fine young women ; but too adventurous.’ Miss Terry smiled, but Mr. Herbert made no reply but an impatient look and a smart crack of the whip over the horse’s head.

‘And how do you like this country, ma’am,’ pursued the Doctor, looking benevolently at Miss Terry.

'Pretty well. It takes time, you know, to recover after being transplanted.'

'Good! ah! very good; that is exactly it. But I may venture to whisper in your ear, but don't let your neighbour hear,' the Doctor looked sly, 'that no one would stay here unless obliged.'

'Indeed! is Mr. Herbert such a staunch defender of this country? I was hardly aware of that,' said Miss Terry.

'I admire the country as nature has made it; but not—Ah! what are they doing? what can this be about, I wonder? O, Mr. Herbert, you are called,' said the Doctor. A party of the foremost equestrians were seemingly at a stand-still. Soon Willie Lang galloped towards the cart.

'Mr. Herbert, is that bog passable? It looks ugly, but Issy will have it we can go on; she is mad, I believe, she and that young Englishman.'

'Let *him* try the bog, if there is any doubt about it,' said Mr. Herbert, rather sarcastically. 'He seems to be a bold rider.'

'Go on!' roared Willie.

'Do not go on!' called out Mr. Herbert; 'you are all mad, I believe.' At the same time urging his horse to such a trot that poor Miss Terry was obliged to hold fast, so rough were the jerks from the hard, stiff tufts of coarse grass, which being rejected by the cattle, grew wild and strong in patches among the more eatable kind.

'Now, then,' said Mr. Herbert to the expectant group who stood round the margin of the bog. 'Now, then, Mr. Farrant, may I trouble you for the horse, since I am to judge of this formidable danger.'

Mr. Farrant quickly dismounted, and took his seat

by Miss Terry with every appearance of satisfaction at the move. Mr. Herbert gravely and cautiously guided the pony to a part of the bog which had no traces of steps. 'Follow!' he called out, in a military tone of command, 'one by one. Let your horses have their heads; and hold on!'

'Come, Doctor, we want you to go first,' said Isabel. 'We know you to be a safe person.'

'Excuse me, my dear young lady, but I would far prefer following the others,' he answered, while reining Sultan back.

'But it is always better, Dr. Marsh, to be first, before it is much trodden down,' said Kate.

'Is it? Then here we go!' cried Mr. Henley, giving his horse a determined lash. 'Music' floundered. Mr. Henley laughed, and urged her on with stick and heels. She gave a sudden spring and slide. Down came the rider flat on his back. He was up again in a moment and waded through the stiff mud. Isabel caught the bridle as 'Music' reared her big head and stumbled up the bank. Mr. Henley's coat was thickly plastered with mud, and there was of course a general laugh as soon as the party were safely over, in which the gay young man joined as heartily as any one. The Doctor had resigned himself to his fate, and with a few muttered exclamations against all colonial customs, that of having bogs after rain in particular, he reached the other side. The spring-cart, too, wonderful to say, survived the danger, and Miss Terry nearly bit her lips to prevent a scream. Mr. Herbert watched her, and immediately rode up to congratulate her on her courage, and offered himself to drive again, but Mr. Farrant would not give up his seat. Miss Terry blushed and smiled as she entered into the badinage

'Quite enough to see that she is not an improving acquaintance,' said he, casting a glance towards Mr. Fitz, who was flirting with Kate.'

'I have known you since you were children in sun bonnets and pinafores,' he added, half apologetically ; 'and I can't help feeling sorry and disappointed if—if I see you led away from good taste.'

'Thank you,' said Isabel, curtsying low ; 'but now to our task , if you wont help me, I will find some one else,' and she tripped on towards Mr. Farrant, who had seated himself by Miss Terry. 'Mr. Farrant, do be so kind as to assist my mother, will you? Miss Terry, I am sorry to disturb you, but will you sit by my father ; he always likes your company, and you can slice the cucumber to please him—will you be so very kind.'

Miss Terry, whose good nature never failed, and who besides saw that Isabel had a reason for her request, immediately complied. Mr. Lang was busy unpacking the basket, and she offered to help him.

Isabel then managed to divide the thoroughly good-tempered Mr. and Mrs. Jolly among those who were more irascible and easily offended. Mrs. Vesey was seated among an undue share of cushions, heaped up by Mr. Jolly, who implicitly believed all she said as to her delicate health and extreme fatigue, and actually robbed his wife of her only shawl to spread under the lady's feet, saying, in reply to Mrs. Vesey's not very eager exclamations against the monopoly, 'O dear, my wife don't mind such things, she has been used to roughing it. She is the best natured creature I ever met with.'

So Mrs. Vesey resigned herself to the cushions, and shawls, and her companion's good nature, and looked

fastened to trees, and shawls and gig cushions spread in the most shady spots they could find, Mr. and Mrs. Jolly made their appearance.

‘You asked me just now what was the matter,’ said Mr. Herbert, coming up to Isabel, who was for a moment resting against a tree without a smile on her face. ‘Suppose I turn questioner and ask what calls forth so grave a look?’

But while he spoke it was gone, and in its stead the peculiar bright, half saucy, half coaxing expression, which she generally wore, returned.

‘I was trying to follow the example of my betters, that’s all,’ said she, pushing back her hair and gathering up her habit, which had before been allowed to fall on the ground. ‘However, I have done considering—now for acting,’ and she moved on a step.

‘Can I assist you?’ asked Mr. Herbert, following.

‘You can do so, if you will,’ said she, looking at him.

‘I am willing, if it be to unpack pies and bottles, but if it be to talk—you know as well as I do how incapable I am, and I have talked enough to-day to last a silent man, like myself, a week.’

‘I pity your poor sister, then, if half an hour’s brisk conversation with a lady in a spring cart dooms her to silence for seven days. But, however, your assistance would be very acceptable beyond the laying out dinner. Parties—certain parties you know, Mr. Herbert—must be divided. Who will you take? Let me see; there is Mrs. Vesey?’

‘Any one but her!—I can’t stand her—pray do not get intimate with her!’ he added, in that dictatorial tone he sometimes assumed.

‘And pray why not?’ said Isabel, quickly; ‘pray what do you know of her?’

‘Quite enough to see that she is not an improving acquaintance,’ said he, casting a glance towards Mr. Fitz, who was flirting with Kate.

‘I have known you since you were children in sun bonnets and pinafores,’ he added, half apologetically ; ‘and I can’t help feeling sorry and disappointed if—if I see you led away from good taste.’

‘Thank you,’ said Isabel, curtsying low ; ‘but now to our task , if you wont help me, I will find some one else,’ and she tripped on towards Mr. Farrant, who had seated himself by Miss Terry. ‘Mr. Farrant, do be so kind as to assist my mother, will you ? Miss Terry, I am sorry to disturb you, but will you sit by my father ; he always likes your company, and you can slice the cucumber to please him—will you be so very kind.’

Miss Terry, whose good nature never failed, and who besides saw that Isabel had a reason for her request, immediately complied. Mr. Lang was busy unpacking the basket, and she offered to help him.

Isabel then managed to divide the thoroughly good-tempered Mr. and Mrs. Jolly among those who were more irascible and easily offended. Mrs. Vesey was seated among an undue share of cushions, heaped up by Mr. Jolly, who implicitly believed all she said as to her delicate health and extreme fatigue, and actually robbed his wife of her only shawl to spread under the lady’s feet, saying, in reply to Mrs. Vesey’s not very eager exclamations against the monopoly, ‘O dear, my wife don’t mind such things, she has been used to roughing it. She is the best natured creature I ever met with.’

So Mrs. Vesey resigned herself to the cushions, and shawls, and her companion’s good nature, and looked

through her glass at the preparations, casting many a sly side look at her brother or husband, which made Isabel's colour mount high. Kate, too, was a 'drone,' as her father said, and Mr. Fitz tied a shawl fantastically over head on the lower branch of a tree, to form a canopy between her and the now powerful sun. Mrs. Jolly laughed as she said, 'What a sweet pretty picture it made. She only wished poor Tom was here to see it,' and then Mrs. Vesey looked through the never-failing glass and nodded at Kate in a meaning way, which made Kate blush. When all was arranged, Mr. Henley contrived a seat for Isabel, declaring she had well earned her dinner and a comfortable seat, and now she must depute him to be her messenger. She cast a quick, and a close observer might have said an anxious, look around, before she suffered herself to be seated. All seemed, however, to go on smoothly. Mr. Budd droned out his long stories to Mrs. Jolly, who had a laugh, or a 'really,' or 'very true,' ready between the pauses. Once, indeed, Mr. Lang began scolding Kate because she did not eat a good dinner, but Miss Terry did her part well, and smoothed things over with great tact. Then came the champagne, and healths were proposed; and then, to Isabel's dismay, Mr. Budd rose, shifted from one long leg to another, and in his nasal tone of voice said—

'And now, ladies and gentlemen, I have—that is, I beg to propose a toast—agreeable I hope to all parties who have any public spirit, and have the good of the district at heart—I say agreeable to all public spirited men—hem—I mean the proposed scheme of a new bridge and church at Bengala. I hope through my own, and the exertions of all this worthy company, especially our excellent minister (bowing to Mr. Farrant),

to have the satisfaction of seeing a handsome brick church, which will, I am sure, raise the value of the land around it, and soon attract settlers. Besides—hem—besides the—the poetical, if I may be allowed the expression, the poetical effect of a spire rising from the forest. So—not detaining you any longer,’ added Mr. Budd, with energy, ‘Here’s to the Bridge of Bengala,’ and he swung his glass round his head and waved himself to and fro in delight.

No one knew exactly what to do. Mr. Jolly said ‘ah’ several times, uncomfortably, and looked towards Mr. Lang, who muttered and frowned as he drew the cork from another bottle.

Isabel begged for Mr. Henley’s song, but Mr. Fitz said they must drink the toast first, and he begged to propose the health of Mr. Lang, with three time three. This was done, and then Mr. Lang rose, and in a thundering voice stammered out something about his opposing that scheme with all his might. He considered, without boasting, that he had a right to a voice in the matter—that he always had, he always would oppose such a mad scheme. It should not be. He would eat his own head first. Mr. Budd might try—’

Here Mr. Farrant said he hoped that they would waive the subject for to-day, so unfitted to the occasion. It was hardly fair to the ladies. Mr. Herbert uttered many a ‘pshaw’ from under his moustachios, and fed his dog from the scraps. Mrs. Vesey with her glass seemed to be enjoying the whole scene, and in reply to Mrs. Jolly’s remark, ‘how unpleasant such little jars were among friends,’ she answered, ‘O, not at all ; it gives quite a *piquante* zest to the whole thing, it makes a variety ; I enjoy it beyond measure !’

Great was the relief to many of the party when Mr.

by Miss Terry
the move. M
the pony to
steps. 'Foll
command, 'a
heads ; and l

'Come, D
Isabel. 'W

'Excuse me
prefer followi
Sultan back.

'But it is
before it is m

'Is it? T
giving his hor
Mr. Henley la
heels. She g
came the rider
a moment and
caught the bri
stumbled up th
plastered with
laugh as soon
the gay young
Doctor had r
few muttered
that of having
the other side.
survived the d
lips to prevent
and immediate
courage, and w
Farrant woul
blushed and s.

I gladly worked my passage home,
And back to England I am come,
Determined never more to roam,
At least in the bush of Australia !
Illawarra, &c.

Stones upon the road I'd break,
And earn my 'seven bob' a-week,
Which must be owned is a better freak,
Than settling in Australia !

Illawarra, Woolongong,
Parramatta, Mittagong !
I like thee when no more among
Thy charms, O bush of Australia !

This song was applauded by all parties. Another was asked for, and after some pressure, Mr. Fitz gave one. But it fell flat, and Isabel casting a quick glance round, saw ominous symptoms of fatigue and weariness. She did not half like the keen looks through her glass, followed by the hearty, though suppressed laughter, which came from Mrs. Vesey. Isabel did not mind an honest joke, but she grew redder and hotter, under this 'fun' of Mrs. Vesey's, which, whatever it might be about, was confined to the ears of her brother Mr. Fitz and Kate. Soon a pencil was evidently brought into play. Isabel resolved to try her best to destroy the picture, and rising quickly proposed their going to explore the top of old Sugar-loaf. 'Let us have two parties under leaders, and each take a different route ; we shall then settle the old dispute as to the easiest and quickest way of ascent.'

'Here am I ready to lead one set, then,' said Mr. Budd. And he began a long-winded repetition of his

Henley said—' Well, if you will all promise not to be offended at my song, you shall have it. I am not responsible for its merits or its faults. Mind, all must join in the chorus. Now then—

Off I set with cash in hands,
And on the map I chose my lands,
But found 'twas nothing but barren sands,
When I got to the bush of Australia !

CHORUS (*which after the first was very heartily joined in by the party*).

Illawarra, Woollongon,
Parramatta, Mittagong,
Famous subject for a song,
Thy charms, O bush of Australia !

Of sheep I bought a precious lot,
Some died of scab and some of rot,
For the deuce a drop of rain we got,
In the beautiful bush of Australia !
Illawarra, &c.

My convict rogues were always drunk,
And kept me in a constant funk,
When every night to bed I slunk,
I wished myself out of Australia !
Illawarra, &c.

That these woes are enough I'm sure you'll own,
But there's one thing more the whole to crown,
My little bark hut did tumble down,
And all in Australia !
Illawarra, &c.

Of house and land and all bereft,
My woolly farm I gladly left,
Making o'er by deed of gift,
To the savages of Australia !
Illawarra, &c.

which followed, and Miss Herbert remarked to the Doctor that a blush was very becoming. But again every one's attention was directed towards Mr. Henley, who was being 'scraped clean' by Mr. Fitz.

'You are dubbed a Bushman for ever, my young friend,' said Dr. Marsh, patting him on the shoulder patronisingly with his whip.

'Henley's bog shall be the name of this place henceforth!' said Isabel. 'But, come, who will follow me? Let the cart and the timid keep in the track, let the brave and admirers of a fine view follow me!' She waved her whip, and led the way up a steepish bank of rough iron stones, interspersed with weeping native cherry-trees.

'Pretty safe, hey?' said the Doctor, who wavered between his dislike of rough-riding and sustaining his character of a 'great admirer of nature, particularly in her wildest freaks,' a favourite phrase of the Doctor's, by the bye. 'Pretty safe, hey?' cautiously guiding Sultan between the bushes and stones. 'Ha, a rolling-stone, very dangerous,—careful, Sultan; bad for ladies' habits, my dear Miss Isabel; a steepish pinch here, Henley—take care of yourself. Ah! indeed, Miss Isabel, you say right—worth the attempt—really a magnificent view!' and as he pulled up his horse, and shifted his spectacles, he breathed a long sigh of admiration, or relief, whichever it might be.

'Well! Mr. Herbert,' said Isabel.

Mr. Herbert bowed.

'Well, we wait for your remarks. Come, describe the scene—point out its beauties—its points—to Mrs. Vesey and Mr. Henley. Nature requires a showman occasionally,' said Isabel. 'You used to be eloquent when we reached this spot, I remember.'

‘That was many years ago,’ Mr. Herbert replied.

‘Perhaps—if—Miss Terry were here, it might—probably it would, inspire the gentleman,’ softly whispered the Doctor to Miss Herbert. ‘Didn’t you think he talked a good deal during the drive?’

Miss Herbert did not catch what he said—she answered—

‘Certainly—I quite agree with you—far too forward—quite bold.’

And Miss Herbert and the Doctor, who looked ‘posed,’ went on, following Mr. Herbert in a track which led back to the road to Sugar-loaf.

There was a great deal of laughing and talking amongst the rest of nature’s admirers on the hill. Mrs. Vesey mimicking Mr. Herbert’s air and manner inimitably well.

‘What is that you are singing, Mr. Henley—an ourang-outang and the bush? What is it? let us hear,’ said Mrs. Vesey, riding on.

‘A song? O, then reserve it for after dinner, pray,’ said Isabel. ‘I shall be so thankful for anything of that kind,’ added she, looking suddenly grave.

‘I could not venture on such a song in such a company. They would call me out,’ said Mr. Henley.

‘O, then! by all means let us have it!’ exclaimed Mrs. Vesey. ‘It would be quite a divertissement to see Mr. Budd, or Mr. Jolly, or even Mr. Herbert—’

The front riders were now in a canter, so the conversation was broken off. They had emerged from the thick scrub of gnarled tea shrubs and native currant bushes, and were now in an open clear space, called in the colony a ‘flat,’ where the trees grew naturally in park-like groups. The conical hill, named Sugar-loaf, from its peculiar shape, appeared in front, rising

almost abruptly from the plain. It was a tempting place for a gallop. Isabel was passing them all on Pearl, and Mr. Fitz complimenting her on her horsemanship. Then she reined in Pearl a little and kept by Kate, talking and laughing, the quick pace at which they were cantering through the air raising the spirits of each. Turning round presently she saw Mr. Herbert riding alone, and apparently in one of his unsociable fits. Pearl was a little pulled in, and she dropped behind her sister and Mr. Fitz. Still the hint was not taken. Mr. Herbert kept his distance. At last she turned on her saddle and said—

‘We had better exchange steeds in returning, Mr. Herbert. I fear my pony has given you trouble. He understands me.’

‘The pony goes very well, thank you.’

Nothing could be more matter-of-fact than these words; yet the tone in which they were spoken struck Isabel. Some voices have so much power of expression!

She looked at him for a moment, and then, being one to speak as her heart prompted, she said—

‘Then—what ails you?’

A sudden, and perhaps involuntary, prick from his spur caused Mr. Herbert’s steed to give a buck jump, gathering up all four legs, and heaving the back in an indescribable, and nearly impossible-to-sit way. Mr. Herbert, however, was a good rider, and perhaps his success in sitting firm, and his skilful management of the pony, pleased him, for he threw off his silence and talked cheerfully to Isabel as they cantered on; and in a few minutes they reached the spot where they were to dine. Mr. and Mrs. Budd were already there, and by the time the horses were comfortably

Tom Jolly, Dr. Marsh, and Captain Smith ! really it is not surprising if we enjoy a little change and fun when it comes ?

‘Hem. . . . Tom Jolly, Dr. Marsh, and myself ! Thank you ! I see what estimation I am held in,’ he exclaimed, working himself out of his late penitent, into an offended mood ; ‘we three are classed as alike, are we ?’

‘Dear Mr. Herbert, no ! Not the least alike ! I don’t mean to compare you. You are not half so good as Tom ! Surely you don’t imagine that you are ?’

‘Oh, he is a very good fellow ; an excellent young man, moral and amiable. I don’t at all dispute his excellence, or even claim to equal it. But in what way do you compare us ?’

‘In nothing, save that you are both such very old and particular friends, that you cease to be amusing. You are not more alike than that great iron bark tree is like a cherry tree. There you are—hard, and tall, and grim. The most unpliant man I ever saw ; it takes a storm at least to bend you. And there is Tom,’ pointing to a native cherry tree, ‘a pliant, gentle, honest, clinging, and loving soul.’

‘Yet, even this superior, ‘loving,’ pliable, elastic youth fails to please, it seems, when any new, noisy and vulgar person comes in the way.’

‘Don’t let the Vesey’s disturb your peace of mind.’

‘They do not. But, Isabel—once I had experience of a disposition, in some ways, as far as I can see, like Mrs. Vesey. If you knew all, you would not wonder at my warning you against that sort of ill-nature, though it is called clever quizzing. Some do say,’ he hesitated a little, ‘that you are inclined to it yourself,

‘Quite enough to see that she is not an improving acquaintance,’ said he, casting a glance towards Mr. Fitz, who was flirting with Kate.

‘I have known you since you were children in sun bonnets and pinafores,’ he added, half apologetically ; ‘and I can’t help feeling sorry and disappointed if—if I see you led away from good taste.’

‘Thank you,’ said Isabel, curtsying low ; ‘but now to our task , if you wont help me, I will find some one else,’ and she tripped on towards Mr. Farrant, who had seated himself by Miss Terry. ‘Mr. Farrant, do be so kind as to assist my mother, will you ? Miss Terry, I am sorry to disturb you, but will you sit by my father ; he always likes your company, and you can slice the cucumber to please him—will you be so very kind.’

Miss Terry, whose good nature never failed, and who besides saw that Isabel had a reason for her request, immediately complied. Mr. Lang was busy unpacking the basket, and she offered to help him.

Isabel then managed to divide the thoroughly good-tempered Mr. and Mrs. Jolly among those who were more irascible and easily offended. Mrs. Vesey was seated among an undue share of cushions, heaped up by Mr. Jolly, who implicitly believed all she said as to her delicate health and extreme fatigue, and actually robbed his wife of her only shawl to spread under the lady’s feet, saying, in reply to Mrs. Vesey’s not very eager exclamations against the monopoly, ‘O dear, my wife don’t mind such things, she has been used to roughing it. She is the best natured creature I ever met with.’

So Mrs. Vesey resigned herself to the cushions, and shawls, and her companion’s good nature, and looked

‘that it was just like him to be so absorbed with his argument as to forget everything else.’

Mr. Henley now claimed Isabel’s attention, and described with spirit and humour their adventures.

‘We ought to be returning, I think,’ she said, and they led the way.

Mr. Herbert, who had been gradually growing graver and graver as the balls flew past his devoted head, now turned to Miss Terry and offered his escort and help down the rough path, hoping she would forgive his seeming neglect of her during their journey up. Very soon these two were in deep conversation. Isabel looking back, saw them, and nodded her head in a very pleased and triumphant way. The rest fell into couples, as they liked. As they gained the level land, they heard a great coo-ee-ing.

‘That is papa! He is tired and wants to go home,’ said Isabel. ‘Or something is wrong.’

This proved to be the case.

Isabel found her father vexed and irritated. Mr. Budd’s horse had slipped his halter, and had caused disturbance among the others. Kate’s pony, Tippoo, had made off in consequence, and Mr. Lang and the man who was in attendance had no little trouble to catch him again.

‘It was hot—the flies were unbearable—the locusts would not be satisfied till they gave every one a splitting headache. What was the use of staying in such a place? Pic-nics were the vilest inventions under the sun.’

Mr. Budd laughed loud as he disagreed. He thought they were the most charming parties possible. It was a lovely—a perfect day. Did not Mr. Herbert think so?

Mr. Herbert had not thought about it, he said, as he swung his cane, and walked off to see how Pearl had fared in the skirmish.

The Vine Lodge party and Kate retired to a shady spot, and had just made themselves comfortable when Mr. Lang insisted on starting homewards.

There were many voices raised against this. It was such a pity so start before the cool of the evening—the best part, the homeward ride, would be entirely spoilt if they had to go while it was so hot. But Mr. Lang said *he* should go—any one who liked to stay longer might do so, only they must beware of the bogs. Isabel said she should go too, and the Jollys thought it quite time to ‘think about it.’

So it ended in the whole party following Mr. Lang. Mr. Herbert drove the spring cart the whole way. He nearly got into a scrape once, he was talking so intently. Isabel did not fail to remark this to Mr. Farrant, who was a little behind her, both trying to keep up with old Peggy’s jog-trot. It was, on the whole, a tame and silent ride, a cloud seemed to have settled on the spirits of every one. The boys whistled and laughed a little, and jumped over a few logs; but in spite of all their entreaties and hallooing, no one followed their example, not even Isabel, and their father called out for them not to make fools of themselves, he would have no scampering or leaping.

‘Well, to be sure!’ sighed Mrs. Lang, ‘I must say, Mr. Lang, you and Mr. Budd might have kept quiet for to-day. I can’t think why you say anything to him, he’s beneath your notice, in my opinion.’

‘A scoundrel! an impertinent, officious scoundrel!’ muttered Mr. Lang as he applied his whip over Peggy’s head with so much vehemence as to astonish

Henley said—‘ Well, if you will all promise not to be offended at my song, you shall have it. I am not responsible for its merits or its faults. Mind, all must join in the chorus. Now then—

Off I set with cash in hands,
And on the map I chose my lands,
But found 'twas nothing but barren sands,
When I got to the bush of Australia !

CHORUS (*which after the first was very heartily joined in by the party*).

Illawarra, Woollongon,
Parramatta, Mittagong,
Famous subject for a song,
Thy charms, O bush of Australia !

Of sheep I bought a precious lot,
Some died of scab and some of rot,
For the deuce a drop of rain we got,
In the beautiful bush of Australia !
Illawarra, &c.

My convict rogues were always drunk,
And kept me in a constant funk,
When every night to bed I slunk,
I wished myself out of Australia !
Illawarra, &c.

That these woes are enough I'm sure you'll own,
But there's one thing more the whole to crown,
My little bark hut did tumble down,
And all in Australia !
Illawarra, &c.

Of house and land and all bereft,
My woolly farm I gladly left,
Making o'er by deed of gift,
To the savages of Australia !
Illawarra, &c.

I gladly worked my passage home,
And back to England I am come,
Determined never more to roam,
At least in the bush of Australia !
Illawarra, &c.

Stones upon the road I'd break,
And earn my 'seven bob' a-week,
Which must be owned is a better freak,
Than settling in Australia !

Illawarra, Woolongong,
Parramatta, Mittagong !
I like thee when no more among
Thy charms, O bush of Australia !

This song was applauded by all parties. Another was asked for, and after some pressure, Mr. Fitz gave one. But it fell flat, and Isabel casting a quick glance round, saw ominous symptoms of fatigue and weariness. She did not half like the keen looks through her glass, followed by the hearty, though suppressed laughter, which came from Mrs. Vesey. Isabel did not mind an honest joke, but she grew redder and hotter, under this 'fun' of Mrs. Vesey's, which, whatever it might be about, was confined to the ears of her brother Mr. Fitz and Kate. Soon a pencil was evidently brought into play. Isabel resolved to try her best to destroy the picture, and rising quickly proposed their going to explore the top of old Sugar-loaf. 'Let us have two parties under leaders, and each take a different route ; we shall then settle the old dispute as to the easiest and quickest way of ascent.'

'Here am I ready to lead one set, then,' said Mr. Budd. And he began a long-winded repetition of his

reasons for preferring one track, while Mr. Herbert took the other side, and maintained there was a shorter and better path.

‘Well, let us range ourselves under these two great captains,’ said Isabel.

Mr. Budd immediately turned to beg Mrs. Vesey to favour him, and she taking his arm, Kate, as a matter of course, followed, accompanied by Mr. Fitz.

‘You come with me,’ said Mr. Herbert to Isabel ; which she agreed to do, after settling the elders comfortably, who preferred remaining still, to toiling up a steep hill.

Miss Herbert, Miss Terry, Mr. Henley, and the Doctor followed Mr. Herbert. The boys ran after the others. But it happened that Mr. Herbert, with Isabel, very soon outstripped their own party.

‘It was a good move of yours, Isabel. That woman’s ill-bred quizzing is intolerable!’ Mr. Herbert spoke with strong annoyance.

‘How hypocritical you are. You never like any one!’ she said, not disposed to own that she in her heart agreed with him.

‘Yes ; I like some persons. I like that nice little creature, Miss Terry.’

‘Indeed ! Well, that is wonderful ! She is highly honoured——’

‘Do you think there is no one else I like?’ he said, seeking her eyes as he spoke.

‘Do you mean by that, that you like me?’

‘Do I mean it?’——

He put out his hand, ‘Isabel ! shake hands. I have been behaving abominably ! Will you forgive me ?’

‘I don’t know what about,’ she said, yielding her hand, but looking shy. ‘What do you mean?’

‘Ah! you know. You asked what ailed me just now. Last evening, too, sulky and miserable as I was, you did not resent it as I deserved. But you see, Isabel, the fact is, I must learn to consider myself as on the shelf, and——’

‘On the shelf? To be read or eaten; what sort of shelf?’

‘Yes!’ he went on, gravely and sadly. ‘It is a difficult lesson, and we all find it so in our turn. To stand aside and let our juniors have their turn, to remember that time is in the natural course of things dividing us—that, in fact, you are growing into bloom, and I am approaching decay.’

Isabel laughed merrily at this, and rallied him for his dismal fancies. But he would not quite throw them off it seemed.

‘I may be—I know I am, or must seem to you, a cross, fussy old fellow. But the fact is, I cannot see you so taken and led by persons of such utterly bad taste, (oh, Isabel! so very different from those I should wish to see as your friends!) without a certain annoyance. I have no right, I know, to speak, or perhaps to judge, but there is something so thoroughly odious——’

‘Come, come, don’t be too severe,’ she interrupted. ‘You have tried to sugar the pill, but I can’t allow our ‘particular friends’ to be abused.’

‘Particular friends! do you call them?’ he said with emphasis.

‘You should remember how sorely we do want a little variety and amusement,’ she went on demurely. ‘So long as we have been confined to one set—yourself,

Tom Jolly, Dr. Marsh, and Captain Smith ! really it is not surprising if we enjoy a little change and fun when it comes ?

‘Hem. . . . Tom Jolly, Dr. Marsh, and myself ! Thank you ! I see what estimation I am held in,’ he exclaimed, working himself out of his late penitent, into an offended mood ; ‘we three are classed as alike, are we ?’

‘Dear Mr. Herbert, no ! Not the least alike ! I don’t mean to compare you. You are not half so good as Tom ! Surely you don’t imagine that you are ?’

‘Oh, he is a very good fellow ; an excellent young man, moral and amiable. I don’t at all dispute his excellence, or even claim to equal it. But in what way do you compare us ?’

‘In nothing, save that you are both such very old and particular friends, that you cease to be amusing. You are not more alike than that great iron bark tree is like a cherry tree. There you are—hard, and tall, and grim. The most unpliant man I ever saw ; it takes a storm at least to bend you. And there is Tom,’ pointing to a native cherry tree, ‘a pliant, gentle, honest, clinging, and loving soul.’

‘Yet, even this superior, ‘loving,’ pliable, elastic youth fails to please, it seems, when any new, noisy and vulgar person comes in the way.’

‘Don’t let the Vesey’s disturb your peace of mind.’

‘They do not. But, Isabel—once I had experience of a disposition, in some ways, as far as I can see, like Mrs. Vesey. If you knew all, you would not wonder at my warning you against that sort of ill-nature, though it is called clever quizzing. Some do say,’ he *hesitated a little*, ‘that you are inclined to it yourself,

and again his penetrating eye was bent on her. 'But I beg your pardon, I see—I have no right now—I forget that you are a 'young lady.' . . . While Isabel played with her parasol, uncertain how to answer him, being rather touched by the earnestness of his manner, and also piqued at his sudden drawing in,—voices proclaimed the others at hand. Mr. Herbert and Isabel had reached the desired point, but, busy in their conversation, had taken no further notice than to stand still.

'Here they are! How long have you been here? Did you look at your watch?' was vociferated.

Mr. Herbert had proved his point, but had overlooked the exact instant.

Mr. Budd did not like giving in. He asked minute questions as to the route they had taken, and when it was seen that of all Mr. Herbert's followers only one was there, and that the others were anywhere, he maintained that it was not a fair victory. 'He could show all his staff.'

But where were the laggards? The boys set off to search, and after much shouting and coo-ee-ing, the ladies appeared, out of breath, wet-footed, and with damaged dresses. Such a path never was seen!

They came quite into a deep bog, and if it had not been for Mr. Henley and Mr. Fitz, they would all have stuck there now! Mr. Budd triumphed. It was this very bog he had known of and expected they would come across. Mr. Herbert knew a track which avoided it, but in his pre-occupation with his companion, he had wholly forgotten the necessity of cautioning the rest of the party. There was of course much rallying, and Isabel cleverly turned all joke from herself by fixing it on her companion, and saying

‘that it was just like him to be so absorbed with his argument as to forget everything else.’

Mr. Henley now claimed Isabel’s attention, and described with spirit and humour their adventures.

‘We ought to be returning, I think,’ she said, and they led the way.

Mr. Herbert, who had been gradually growing graver and graver as the balls flew past his devoted head, now turned to Miss Terry and offered his escort and help down the rough path, hoping she would forgive his seeming neglect of her during their journey up. Very soon these two were in deep conversation. Isabel looking back, saw them, and nodded her head in a very pleased and triumphant way. The rest fell into couples, as they liked. As they gained the level land, they heard a great coo-ee-ing.

‘That is papa! He is tired and wants to go home,’ said Isabel. ‘Or something is wrong.’

This proved to be the case.

Isabel found her father vexed and irritated. Mr. Budd’s horse had slipped his halter, and had caused disturbance among the others. Kate’s pony, Tippoo, had made off in consequence, and Mr. Lang and the man who was in attendance had no little trouble to catch him again.

‘It was hot—the flies were unbearable—the locusts would not be satisfied till they gave every one a splitting headache. What was the use of staying in such a place? Pic-nics were the vilest inventions under the sun.’

Mr. Budd laughed loud as he disagreed. He thought they were the most charming parties possible. It was a lovely—a perfect day. Did not Mr. Herbert *think* so?

Mr. Herbert had not thought about it, he said, as he swung his cane, and walked off to see how Pearl had fared in the skirmish.

The Vine Lodge party and Kate retired to a shady spot, and had just made themselves comfortable when Mr. Lang insisted on starting homewards.

There were many voices raised against this. It was such a pity so start before the cool of the evening—the best part, the homeward ride, would be entirely spoilt if they had to go while it was so hot. But Mr. Lang said *he* should go—any one who liked to stay longer might do so, only they must beware of the bogs. Isabel said she should go too, and the Jollys thought it quite time to ‘think about it.’

So it ended in the whole party following Mr. Lang. Mr. Herbert drove the spring cart the whole way. He nearly got into a scrape once, he was talking so intently. Isabel did not fail to remark this to Mr. Farrant, who was a little behind her, both trying to keep up with old Peggy’s jog-trot. It was, on the whole, a tame and silent ride, a cloud seemed to have settled on the spirits of every one. The boys whistled and laughed a little, and jumped over a few logs; but in spite of all their entreaties and hallooing, no one followed their example, not even Isabel, and their father called out for them not to make fools of themselves, he would have no scampering or leaping.

‘Well, to be sure!’ sighed Mrs. Lang, ‘I must say, Mr. Lang, you and Mr. Budd might have kept quiet for to-day. I can’t think why you say anything to him, he’s beneath your notice, in my opinion.’

‘A scoundrel! an impertinent, officious scoundrel!’ muttered Mr. Lang as he applied his whip over Peggy’s head with so much vehemence as to astonish

her, so dutifully was she rolling along in her best trot.

‘Well, never mind, Mr. Lang, don’t call names—think no more of it! It has, of course, spoilt the party, and shocked poor Mrs. Vesey.’

‘Spoilt the party! and *who* spoilt the party, eh? Mrs. Lang, but that . . .’

‘Pull up, pull up, papa,’ called out Isabel, ‘you don’t see that awkward stump. How well Peggy goes to-day, I can hardly keep up with you,’ added she, as she cantered alongside of the gig.

‘Come, Issy, after all, that pony has a prettier action than that trumpery concern Mr. Herbert mounted you on to-day. Some people are uncommonly conceited, and think all their geese swans.’

As the daughter, riding so well, and smiling and talking so goodhumouredly kept beside him, Mr. Lang’s mood changed. He laughed in delight as he kept the rest of the party behind. He went at such a pace, that Mrs. Lang declared he must be mad, and they should certainly be upset, and she desired Isabel to keep behind or before, and said that neither she nor her father had any mercy on her nerves.

She grew annoyed as Mr. Lang grew merry, till at last, as they came to the more open road, Isabel galloped on and left them to follow more at their leisure.

CHAPTER XI.

CURTAIN LECTURES.

THERE was a long evening before them, and Mrs. Lang was quite tired, and said that her daughters must amuse the party. Kate agreed as far as playing chess with Mr. Fitz went, and Mrs. Vesey contrived to keep several of them round her, including Dr. Marsh and the boys, while she drew comic figures with astonishing rapidity. Miss Terry was almost entirely at the pianoforte, while Mr. Herbert, always fond of music, sat near her, his arms crossed and his pointed chin turned upwards, utterly unconscious how well Mrs. Vesey's pencil had represented him, and how much of the tittering and whispering which came from that table was occasioned by his own attitude. Isabel, meantime, passed from one party to another, encoring Miss Terry, and bringing out all the few books and curiosities in the house for Miss Herbert; while a pile of old newspapers was fetched for Mr. Vesey, who had expressed a wish to see the market prices of two years since.

The early hours and active habits of the family did not generally allow of any of those fascinating talks at 'brushing hair' time to which young ladies are said to be prone. To-night, however, proved an exception, and the two sisters, for once in a way remained to talk over the day.

‘It has been such a delightful day, hasn’t it?’ said Kate.

‘I was thinking,’ said her sister, ‘I can’t make up my mind quite. It is pleasant to see some new faces, but on the whole, I do believe I have had more trouble than pleasure.’

‘I enjoyed it all, all but that very stupid speechifying. But Mrs. Vesey is enough to make everything pleasant. She turns all into fun.’

‘You and she are inseparable, and that brother of hers—do you really like him, Kate?’

‘Why, don’t you?’

‘I know nothing about him. But, somehow, they are complete strangers after all, and I think we should be careful; we do not know them at all.’

‘Nonsense! What is there to know? They are of good family, and have some fortune, and are the most agreeable people we have in the whole district. Take it altogether there were really a respectable set of gentlemen,’ continued Kate, ‘Mr. Henley and Mr. Farrant, but Mr. Fitz is the best, out and out.’

‘Umph. You forget Mr. Herbert, and really, I think not one of them cuts him out, when he likes to be sociable. Kate! an idea has got into my head, and it won’t go out again. Guess what it is.’

‘How can I—is it about me?’

‘No, but it savours of matrimony.’

‘I am sure I can’t guess then.’

‘The very thing. Just exactly the right thing! Unique, charming; O, Kate!’

‘I am sure I can’t guess, unless it is of yourself; who is there but you and me?’

‘No one else? What not in this very house? O,

Kate! how can you so overlook Miss Terry? Come, now you can guess, I am sure.'

'Miss Terry! a governess!'

'Yes, a governess, but what a delicate, gentle, sensible little thing it is; what a meek, yet spirited wife she will make for—for—come, Kate, do you give up?'

'Yes! I thought you hated matchmaking, Issy.'

'Matchmaking! Why, girl, I make no matches, I only imagine what a wife there is ready made for Mr. Herbert. I am passive, quite, but I see and I wish. I didn't bring them together; I didn't give her that matchless voice, the very thing he most affects; I didn't tell her to sing his favourite songs better than all the others; I didn't give her eyes with that soft downward turn, or eyebrows so delicately arched, or her figure, that quiet, ladylike grace, which is his very exemplification of what should be—the realization of his ideal, in fact. I have heard him describe her exactly when he wishes to give one a model, and here, in this out-of-the-way place, she comes, just as he returns home; quite like a novel! Kate, it is already a fact arranged. Decide on your bridesmaid costume. I, for my part, mean to study the concoction of bride-cake.'

'You are absurd, Issy! You can't be sure. He may not like to marry a governess; though, I am sure I don't care whom he marries! And as to her, I wish her joy, for they say he has a temper of his own.'

'To be sure! a fine, blazing, warm, kind, domineering temper, too! And she will be oil and sunshine. Hurrah! I say, Kate, we must be very careful not to betray our idea. That would spoil all, only it will

be fun to watch the process of a real courtship, and silyly help it on, you know.'

'Our idea? It is quite all your own. Take care of yourself. I am sure you will go and tell Mr. Herbert, or allow him to read it in your face, as he often does. Besides, I suspect, Issy, there will be other things to divert your attention soon. Some people say a certain gentleman rather likes you.'

'O, yes, a great many do. I should be sorry to think it was only one.'

'Well, people talk about me,' returned Kate, rather affectedly. 'But really I think, Issy, you are the greater flirt or coquette now. I am sure I am quite content with one. . . .'

'How moderate! I am not; I require a variety. That would be the worst of being engaged, and all that nonsense. It would spoil all the fun to be tied down to one. I couldn't stand it,' said Isabel, laughing.

'Well, I shall laugh when you are fairly caught. And caught you will be soon, or, to borrow papa's expression, my name is not Kate. But I am sleepy, so good night.'

'Good night!' Isabel returned.

Meanwhile another colloquy was going on in the 'state-room,' as it was called.

Mr. Vesey, in his dressing-gown, was looking out of the window.

'What a aw—confounded noise these wild cattle are—aw—making. And by Jove if it isn't as black as ink out there, and looking like aw—rain. Pretty job to be aw—kept here to-morrow—eh!'

'I shouldn't care; as we have no cook, it will be convenient. Besides, I want to ascertain for

myself in what state these folks' affairs really are. That creature Budd insinuates that Kate's beauty will be her portion. Yet they said in Sydney that both the girls would have something handsome on their wedding-day, to say nothing of what the father may leave.'

'Well, Arthur, is—aw—not losing time, any way. He is rather particular, I should say; don't you?'

'Nothing but mere flirtation. As to that, if we find Mr. Budd right, Arthur can easily back out of it. I shall send him off at once; though I believe Arthur is not one to forget the one thing, even for the sake of Kate's bright eyes. What a fool the girl makes of herself about him, swallowing all the nonsense he talks.'

'Every man to his taste—aw—of course, but give me the other girl—aw—upon my soul, she's—aw a deuced nice little thing, aw—plenty of spirit you know—and—to my thinking, very handsome, too.'

'She is my particular aversion,' returned his wife, with asperity. 'That girl presumes to—to—'

'I thought she cut you up sharp, aw—my dear!' laughed the husband.

'Cut me up! Her cool way is unbearable. The only redeeming point in these people is their having a little money, and possessing the sense to see they are ages and ages behind civilization. The notion of presuming to set me right,—to set up, as she does, for a character; and to order about her elder sister, too! But she will learn who has most influence over Kate yet. I will pay back Miss Isabel Lang, sooner or later.'

'Ay, ay! I didn't know it had reached—aw—to this point! Well, if there is war between you—it

will—aw, be great fun, aw—for you are both great spirits, and clever, aw—and all that, you know. How has 'Issy,' as they call her, managed to—aw, offend you, my love ?

'In every way. But I will show her I am her match yet. Do you hear, Mr. Vesey ; don't go and make a fool of yourself, and flatter up that young lady, because I don't approve of her at all. As to Arthur, it will be a bore, now we have taken this place and all, if our information turns out incorrect. Kate without money is not of course to be thought of. If she had a few thousands, I should be glad to have Arthur settled down as a married man. It may steady him.'

'Good luck to the poor girl who has that brother of yours, my dear. Upon my soul I pity her. I say, I affirm, Arthur Fitz may have—aw—a long head, and all that, but I say, I don't mind betting anything, he hasn't aw—a heart as big as a kitten's.'

'Never mind hearts——Dear me, there comes the rain, I do believe !' and Mrs. Vesey put out the light, and ceased talking.

Beneath her gay and girlish manner, this lady had a very calculating and shrewd mind. Mr. Vesey possessed a very tolerable fortune, but there had been troubles in the family, and there were several poor relations. It was partly to avoid them, and partly in hopes of realizing a large fortune very speedily, that they came to the colony. Her only brother accompanied them, having come to the end of the little he inherited, after a few years' gay living. He too was shrewd and selfish ; he liked money, but was too fond of pleasure to work for it if it could be had without. For some time he had lived upon his brother-in-law, and

while they were in Sydney Mrs. Vesey determined that he must marry some one with money. They met the Langs at some parties, and were struck with the evidence of wealth displayed, as well as by Kate's beauty, which was great. An acquaintance was directly brought about, and through Mr. Lang they heard of the Vine Lodge estate, which might be had a great bargain, he said. The Langs' fortune was exaggerated in Sydney, and it served to turn the scale, and decide the Veseys on going to Vine Lodge. Wealthy neighbours whom she might flatter, and turn to use as well as fun, just pleased Mrs. Vesey, and to secure so desirable a prize as Kate for her brother, she would have taken much trouble. Her husband, though very liberal, and entirely led by her, was beginning to be tired of supplying Arthur Fitz with funds, and in fact his marriage was an event much desired by his sister, for more reasons than she cared to say. Hitherto all had prospered. Mrs. Lang, completely charmed by the notice of so 'fashionable' a person as Mrs. Vesey, cultivated the acquaintance, and fulfilled all that lady's hopes and calculations with respect to being a 'good neighbour,' i.e., supplying Vine Lodge with fruit and vegetables, and lending this and that, while the place was yet rough and disordered.

Langville was entirely at their service while their own place was being furnished, and Langville horses and carriages at their disposal. There was but one hitch, which had a little startled Mrs. Vesey from the very first, and which gave her more uneasiness as she saw more of her. Isabel, though readily entering into the fun and the spirit of their new neighbours, had a keener observation than her mother and sister. She saw sometimes more than Mrs. Vesey intended, and

did not scruple to show that she saw. In fact, Mrs. Vesey could neither completely win and fascinate, or awe Isabel. She felt she had found her match, and that her worldly schemes might be frustrated through the influence and good sense of Isabel. There was something also of truth in her husband's remark. Of Kate's beauty, Mrs. Vesey never dreamt of being jealous; it was so very different from her own style. But there was in Isabel enough of similarity to provoke the spirit of rivalry. Now Mrs. Vesey never could endure to divide her reign. She must be acknowledged the sole and undisputed queen of her own peculiar territory. She prided herself on her wit and her power of repartee, on her always speaking home truths ; and while she was eminently fashionable, she professed to hold herself free from all restraint,—to wear, and to say, and to do, just what pleased herself.

All this dazzled Kate, and Mrs. Vesey's word was law to her in all matters of taste. But Isabel, looking on, had detected that Mrs. Vesey was in reality playing her sister and mother a trick, and, according to school-boy phrase, was 'chaffing' them.

Mrs. Vesey also found that she did not entirely carry away the adoration of the district, as she had expected. Some persons preferred Isabel's merry ways and fun. So this, with several other small things, made Mrs. Vesey look on Isabel with increasing dislike and suspicion.

CHAPTER XII.

A RAINY FOREGROUND AND RUIN IN PERSPECTIVE.

'IT is quite impossible for any one to go out to-day,' said Mr. Lang, in true hospitable fashion, regarding the rain as a Godsend.

They were waiting breakfast for Mrs. Vesey.

'I don't believe I'll get my letters,' he continued, with that utter confusion of 'shall' and 'will' which is a great characteristic of 'Currency' talk, 'unless I ride for them myself. The boy will never stand this rain.'

It might truly be said that it 'poured.' Streams of water ran over the road; and the low land was like one large pond or lake. The rain was so hard that even the covered way, leading from the house to the kitchen, did not protect the servants from getting wet as they passed, the wind drifting in at the open sides.

The covers of the various dishes were wet when placed on the table. A regular Australian breakfast it was! Langville was famous for good cheer. Beef-steaks, bacon, kidneys, cold meat, plenty of fresh eggs, peach jam, marmalade of various kinds, honey and fruit, with West Indian yams, potatoes, and a large dish of boiled rice and curry brought up the rear.

Mr. Herbert was teaching the boys to tie some particular knot, and there was a grand consultation as to what was to be the order for the day. Mr. Lang

insisted on every one, 'every soul,' remaining at Langville. But Mr. Herbert demurred. He had business.

'Of course ye have. I could have taken my oath ye had business! Steam mill, eh?' said Mr. Lang, in that way, half-joke half-earnest, he used often to Mr. Herbert.

Then Mr. Farrant ventured to say that two idle days running would not do for him. He must go home.

Mr. Vesey, while observing the dishes, and settling which he would try first, laughed at the notion of minding a wetting. He had heard of being 'snowed' up, but never of being 'rained' up, since the time of Noah, ha! ha! ha!'

'Haven't ye? Well, keep your eyes open, and I'll lay a wager ye'll know the meaning of being rained up. Soon, too!' said Mr. Lang.

'You'll have to be quick, sir,' put in Willie, 'or you'll have to swim Petty's Creek.'

Miss Herbert at last consented to remain, as well as Mrs. Vesey, till the roads should be in a better state. Mr. Herbert promised to return for her, as soon as it was possible.

'Three days' quarantine, at least, Miss Herbert,' said Isabel. 'I watched the moon set last night, and I knew how it would be. And pray why must you go?' she added, turning round suddenly on Mr. Herbert. 'Is your presence at home so positively indispensable?'

'Of course, Issy! Why you forget the mill, the steam mill!' said Mr. Lang, laughing.

'I should like to stay,' Mr. Herbert said, speaking low, so as only to be heard by Isabel.

'Then do! You owe me some politeness, you know,

Stay, and I'll be so much obliged. Miss Terry! wont you second me?'

That lady looked up, but evidently had not heard what it was she was required to do, and Mrs. Vesey rallied her on being absent and 'dreamy.'

'Don't you think Mr. Herbert ought to stay here to-day?' asked Isabel.

'Certainly, certainly,' answered Miss Terry; colouring a very little, but not showing any further awkwardness.

'If Miss Terry thinks so, I really think I must. No, I forgot! I can't stay this morning. But I will make a point of returning this evening,' Mr. Herbert said, looking pleased.

Here Mrs. Lang called Isabel aside. Then she was occupied with putting up some books belonging to Mr. Farrant.

'Are you ready, Mr. Herbert?' said the clergyman, coming in. 'I must ask to keep with you, not knowing the ford which Willie makes out so formidable.'

The two gentlemen bowed, and were soon trotting off, as fast as the slippery road would allow.

There was some little difficulty in finding 'in-door' amusement for so large a party at Langville. Neither of the ladies had brought work, but Mrs. Vesey proposed their going to the store, to learn to make custards. Miss Herbert begged for writing materials, saying she had a letter to get ready for the post. While Mrs. Lang was preparing to teach her friends the mystery of a good custard, Mrs. Vesey's untiring pencil was busy. She was drawing caricatures. First there was her brother and his dog, an ugly terrier, with the proverb, 'Love me, love my dog.' He laugh-

ingly protested against his having such a hooked nose, but his sister declared it was exactly like, and appealed to Kate for her opinion. Kate said it was 'horrid,' at which the gentleman confessed he felt consoled ; but Mrs. Vesey rather drove poor Kate into a corner by pretending to be hurt at her drawing being so condemned and criticised. Then came a rough but very clever sketch of their party at the pic-nic. Mr. Budd was admirable ; Isabel said she could hear his 'twanging' voice, talking of his zeal for public good, and coming down with fifty pounds, winking all the time. 'How can you do them so well? so very like?' she asked Mrs. Vesey.

'Try. You will find it very easy with practice. Try on fat Mr. Jolly.'

Isabel did try, and as she had a natural turn for the sort of thing, and a free, true touch, it was no bad attempt.

'Capital!' said Mr. Fitz. 'Why you are a genius, Miss Isabel.'

'Famous!' exclaimed Mrs. Vesey. 'Now, try Mr. Herbert! Oh, pray do!' added she, as Isabel shook her head, and pushed away the paper.

'It is hardly fair,' said Isabel. 'If they were present—perhaps—but to laugh at the absent——'

'Who on earth would dare to laugh at Mr. Herbert, to his face?' said Kate, in an alarmed voice.

'Come, try! Positively I want your idea of Mr. Herbert's physiognomy, Miss Isabel Lang. It is a study.'

Miss Herbert, who was sitting at another table, and was deaf, had not heard all that was said, but the name of Herbert struck her. She looked up, and catching Mrs. Vesey's eye, that lady quickly gave her Isabel's

profile of Mr. Jolly. 'A portrait by Miss Isabel Lang. Good, isn't it, Miss Herbert?'

'Indeed I am no judge. It doesn't strike me as being like. I cannot approve of caricatures,' she added, rising and going out of the room.

'Now, then, we have offended the respectable spinster!' said Mrs. Vesey. 'She has retreated in anger—true tragedy style! I will have my revenge too, in a full-length portrait—toss of the chin and all! By the way, she is like her brother, the grand signior. Are they supposed to be much attached, and all that sort of thing? I conclude neither party will ever marry. Is there any fraternal bond or promise of perpetual union?'

'Oh, no! Why Miss Herbert would give a good deal to be married,' said Kate.

'My dear creature! What! Do you mean it? Hasn't she turned the awkward corner yet? Bless me! I thought she had passed that formidable turn in life. I considered her quite as one of the extremely respectable, delightful, charming sisterhood of single ladies.'

'So she has. So she is,' said Isabel. 'I am sure there is nothing whatever to justify Kate's idle remark.'

'Well, Issy, all I can say is,' Kate answered, peevishly, 'if she doesn't think of it, some one else does. Miss Herbert is not averse to the attentions of—— But what are you laughing at?' she suddenly said, blushing.

'Only at your shrewd sagacity and your charming simplicity, my dear girl! So I find all my little romances about primitive life in the Bush melt away, on near inspection. These two excellent beings are

not bound together as brother and sister, as I conceived. They are just like other mortals, and would marry—if they could. Perhaps that is what makes him so ‘crusty’ at times. I might say ‘low,’ but I prefer plain English, and have a leaning to culinary similes. He is ‘crusty’ sometimes, and puts a ‘damper’ on one’s gaiety. But I find no fault. He is an original. I adore originality. He is too proud to be *bonâ fide* a settler and make money, too high in his notions to do without money, and too conscious of his powers to consent to being a mere nobody in England.’

‘That is it, exactly. How clever you are, dear Mrs. Vesey!’ said Kate, looking admiringly and lovingly at her new friend.

The discussion was stopped by a summons from Mrs. Lang for all the ladies who wished to help in the custards. Mr. Fitz insisted that he should be very useful in beating up eggs, and made them laugh by tying on one of the little girls’ pinafores and tucking up his sleeves. All went to the store but Isabel. She put on her bonnet and paced up and down the verandah, on that side of the house where the rain did not beat in.

The coolness of the air was acceptable, and with every big drop that fell, there were pleasing associations of good crops and of green verdure, instead of dry, sere grass, or the soil gaping in ugly cracks for the moisture it so often lacked.

She stood leaning against a pillar at the further end of the verandah for a moment, looking at the strange scene before her. The lowlands were a sheet of water, out of which thin, spare trees with attenuated foliage raised themselves ; their fantastic ribbons of

hanging bark! now wet and dank. Streams coursed down the road which led to the house; streams of water which, if they had been wisely saved in tanks, would have been a provision in time of need in that land where so often 'no water is.' Cattle and sheep and horses gathered together beneath such miserable shelter as the narrow and scanty foliage of the bush afforded. Yet was it a cheering prospect for them. Two days' sunshine would raise, as if by magic, many a banquet of juicy grass, particularly wherever a black gin had chanced to kindle a fire. These emerald spots, few and rare, are indeed the jewels of the bush.

But some one was to be seen riding through the wet, braving the falling torrents, and guiding the slipping horse over the now hidden ruts and stumps. He came nearer, into the entrance road. The only gate of which Langville could boast, was heard to bang heavily through the pattering of the rain as it fell on the pavement round the verandah. For one moment the horseman was lost to Isabel's view—as he descended the dip—then again he appeared. 'It must be Mr. Herbert,' thought she. 'I am glad he is come. No—why it is my father; where can he have been—for the letters perhaps. He must have expected an important one, to go on such a day!' It was Mr. Lang, and in five minutes more he rode up to the house; 'hallooed' for the man to take his horse, and swore at him for not being quick enough. Then muttering beneath his slouched and dripping hat something about 'Rascals and vagabonds and cursed times,' he came on to the verandah—stopped short at seeing Isabel, and asked what she did there; whether she wanted to grow like the green barley?

‘I was tired of the house ; but where have you been, sir ? how wet you are. Why did you go out to-day ?’

‘Go out ! why, because I expected a letter. The rascal has written ; I have it ; precious document ! Grinding a poor man to dust, ruin, starvation, beggary. No more pic-nics or government balls, which your mother is mad about. Issy, I am a ruined man ! We are beggars. You must turn to and work, my girl ! I pay 800*l.* a year in mortgages already, and now I applied to Barr, and the good-for-nothing, usurious rascal has the impudence to offer me 300*l.* for a bill of three months for 700*l.* ! I asked him if he really had the conscience to do so, and he writes word—‘Conscience and I have taken leave of each other for some time. This is my offer. Take it or not, as you like.’

‘But why go to him, sir—why not sell stock ?’

‘Sell ! just show me how ! show me who will buy. Sixpence a head for my best merinos, I suppose. Yes, ‘sell !’ Easy to say ‘sell !’ I must either answer this demand for 300*l.* or become insolvent. I know not where to raise it ! The colony is ruined. They’ve taken away our convict labour ; that was the beginning. However, Westbrook, thank goodness, is settled on your mother—it may be a retreat for us yet.’

‘I did not know how seriously bad your affairs were,’ said Isabel.

‘Not worse than my neighbours, that’s one comfort. Budd is hard up, they say ; and Herbert even says he shall have to let Warratah and go to his station. The sooner the better. ‘Pon my soul that fellow is abominable ! But for him and his confounded ‘public good’

items, I could get that bridge at once. It would raise my land directly ; but he's as obstinate as a mule. Why, I even put it to him in a way most men are open to. I convinced him it would be best for his pocket hereafter. I even went so far as to offer him a consideration, if he would withdraw his opposition, and, if you believe me——'

'O papa ! Did you do that ! How could you ?' exclaimed his daughter, really distressed.

'What harm ? But, as I was going to say, he drew up like an emperor and declined, and, by Jove, looked so haughty and so confounded sulky, that I out with it, and gave him a little bit of my mind. I told him a few things, and if he shows himself here again very soon—why, he is a bolder man than I thought.'

Isabel was silent for some time. At last she said—

'O, papa ! you have made me downright wretched.'

'How so ?' he returned quickly, looking at her.

'I hope you don't mean that——'

'I meant such a good scheme ! It was all so very comfortable and pat, and now you have gone and destroyed it all ! Yet you profess to like Miss Terry, too.'

'Miss Terry ? Is the girl gone mad ? How have I injured her, for goodness sake ?'

'Don't you see, daddy, that she, being a very taking little woman, has managed to please even that difficult to be pleased man, Mr. Herbert ? Fact—I assure you. They are made for each other. And I had set my heart on it ; and now you see you have driven him away, and destroyed the hope.'

'By Jupiter ! how these women do go on ! As if I could possibly have suspected such a plot. Besides, she's too good for him—much too good. Let it alone, Issy, and don't interfere with his concerns.'

‘But Miss Terry. She is a governess, and it would be such a good thing for her to have a home of her own, and then we should have her near us. Confess, now, it is not such a bad idea.’

‘I am sure—if she wishes it. I should be very sorry to injure her. Well, well—I have given him a flea in the ear, ’tis true ; but I leave you women to make it up. If he likes her, it isn’t my words that will keep him away.’

‘And, now, what can be done, papa, about our affairs. How can we retrench ?’

‘Don’t know. I did say to your mother we must not indulge in a governess now, but she was ‘up’ about it in a minute, and I confess I should be loth to part with the little woman, especially if you are right in your conjectures.’

‘Yes ; we must not send her away, whatever we do, papa, yet awhile. Who, then, can go ?’

‘Well, we must cut down the list of people about the place. Such a number of rations really hampers one now-a-days. That girl—that do-nothing lass—why should she be on us ? She might go for one, and two or three of the men I shall send off. Your mother is always in rows with that girl, too, Issy, and if you take my advice you will let her go home.’

‘Such a home as it is, though !’

‘She could do well enough if she would. There is Venn wanting to marry her. And if she wont have him, let her go home and keep steady, and she could hear of a place in time. I assure you her being here leads to mischief. It sets all the men up, for somehow she is a great favourite, and it makes jealousy with the other servants.’

‘Well, then, she shall go. She will not keep rules,

I know, and is always running out, which mamma is angry about. Poor girl, I fear she will get into some mischief before long.'

When Isabel and her father joined the others, they found that Dr. Marsh had come in Mr. Herbert's gig to fetch Miss Herbert—much to her surprise, as her brother had promised to come. Isabel looked at her father, and he smiled.

'He's sulky with me—that's it, ma'am. He and I had some argument; and I'll lay a wager, when you return, he'll call me a few pretty names.'

Miss Herbert tried to get up a laugh, and said something about disputes and arguments, and then said she would go at once to prepare for her drive. Isabel followed, and helped her to gather her things together.

'Didn't your brother send any message to say why he didn't come himself?' she asked, uneasily.

'No, none. Perhaps he is engaged; and Dr. Marsh is very kind always.'

'Yes—very. Do you think your brother,—Mr. Herbert, is really much interested in the bridge question?'

'Yes—very much,' Miss Herbert said, drily.

'How tiresome it is. You don't think that he is angry, I hope? Papa is unguarded, you see, but at bottom he means kindly.'

'I dare say. But my brother, being a military man, has been accustomed to great respect and regard for the sensitiveness of a gentleman's feelings—a thing little understood here.'

'I hope politeness is understood,' Isabel answered, bridling up a little. 'But, however,' she added, with heightened colour, 'please Miss Herbert try and persuade your brother not to be angry, to forgive us, and not to desert us!'

‘Your father and he will judge about that,’ Miss Herbert answered, with cold reserve. She did not like Isabel’s evident wish to bring her brother there. ‘Besides, my brother has plenty to do,’ she added, ‘and these are not times to allow of pleasure-taking and idling. He has been too fond of throwing away his time. I can’t conscientiously urge him to visit here so often.’

‘We don’t wish to hinder his work, of course,’ said Isabel, trying to be cold and calm too ; ‘and, after all, he must take his own way ; only I don’t like misunderstandings.’

‘You seem very earnest in the matter ! Shall I take any message from you to my brother, telling him of the flattering interest you have in his concerns, and the regret you show at any fear of his staying away rather more than he has done ?’

This was said in an ironical tone, which Isabel resented.

‘Thank you ! I won’t trouble you with any message, since as far as regards myself it is a matter of no consequence at all. Luckily we have now such an agreeable addition to our neighbourhood, what with the Vine Lodge people and the Parsonage, that we can spare——’

‘Old friends !’ put in Miss Herbert, shortly, as she turned to leave the room, all equipped for her drive.

‘Those who are too busy to come,’ Isabel quietly added, and here their talk ended.

The Doctor was ready, and very soon after watching this pair drive down the road, Mrs. Vesey was summoned by her husband to depart. They left under protest, and with a promise to come again very soon.

CHAPTER XIII.

LYNCH'S SKYLARK.

FOR a few days Langville subsided into great quiet. The only visitor was Mr. Farrant, and, as many of his flock lived on the Langville estate, there seemed to be always a reason for his coming. Mrs. Lang pitied his bachelorhood, too, and always persuaded him to remain for some meal and a little society. This he never seemed disinclined to do. He was certainly sociable, and he managed to please and fit in with every one in the house. He assisted Miss Terry by correcting an exercise now and then, or recommending a book, or setting a sum. He brought new music and new drawings, as well as books for the young ladies, and for Mrs. Lang he had always some request, some tale fitted for her motherly compassion, of his scattered and wild parishioners. The accounts he sometimes gave of a solitary hut or 'gunjo' which he came upon unexpectedly in his rides, pitched in some deep secluded gully, where, perhaps, two men lived for a time, cutting bark or sawing planks of the red cedar used for furniture and building, would have made many a stirring tale. Often he was made to understand by inuendoes or broader hints that one of these hut mates had suddenly disappeared, and although

a plausible story was told of his destination by the other, it was too plain that grave suspicions of foul play existed. But there was no evidence, no one to witness, no one to be interested in the missing man's fate, sufficiently to hunt up and ascertain the truth of the reports. He might certainly be gone away to a remote place, to 'Five Islands' or 'New Zealand' as his companion asserted, or he might even then be lying in the gully, under some gum-tree.

Mrs. Lang warned Mr. Farrant not to ride too much alone among such people, and she had many anecdotes to relate in return, proving the wildness of life, and the consequences to which evil passions led, without the restraint of society and law.

Isabel enjoyed these quiet visits. Mr. Farrant's refined and gentle cast of mind was new to her. She liked to make him talk of England, of its customs, its buildings, and associations.

True, he never showed the power and force with which Mr. Herbert sometimes spoke ; but he was far more equable, and his tastes took a wider field. There was no subject on which Mr. Farrant could not make a pleasant observation in a gentlemanly way, imbuing everything with a little of his own sentiment. Whereas, Mr. Herbert often refused to enter on a subject at all, saying abruptly that he knew 'nothing about it.' When in the mood, he would turn, and in a few words crush all the clergyman's plausible remarks, begging pardon afterwards, and confessing that Mr. Farrant's was a more popular and pleasing theory. He could make himself disagreeable, even Isabel owned ; but when it pleased him to throw off this coat of mail, when he contrived to get her apart from others, and with Miss Terry or one other genial listener, then—who could

talk as he did ? The pity was, that rare indeed were the times !

Now it was convenient and pleasant to have some one not given to 'moods,' but provided with plenty of current small change ready to pass round to whoever wished for it. Little did it matter apparently to Mr. Farrant whether his companions really appreciated the poetry he quoted, or understood his favourite arguments ; he persevered ; and consequently impressed many people with the idea that he was a very 'intellectual man,' quite a 'poet' in fact ! No sharp remark or far-fetched allusion made his hearers feel thoroughly ashamed of their ignorance ; but he seemed to utter their own thoughts, so that each one was felt raised in his own esteem when with him, surprised at his own taste, astonished, and almost persuaded, that he was, after all, rather literary, and not so very ignorant ! With Mr. Herbert, it need hardly be said, the effect was quite contrary.

'Besides this, the true amiability of the clergyman, so ready with friendly sympathy, won all hearts ; and Isabel was pleased to find that her father was often amused by him, and seemed to look forward to his visits. Mr. Farrant took interest in the erection of a 'boiling-down shed,' which Mr. Lang, following the prevailing fashion, hoped would succeed—One of those resources, suggested by the exigency of the times, as a means of turning their large, herds of cattle into some profit ; and while occupied with the work, and calculating the probable results, Mr. Lang forgot his panic, and fell back to very much his former life and spirits.

The Bridge question was for the present in abeyance, the Government authorities having taken it up ;

so that Isabel guessed that her father's ire had subsided, and that if Mr. Herbert would overlook the past, he might soon find his old welcome. But this he did not seem inclined to try. On the first Sunday following their dispute Mr. Lang had angrily refused to allow any of the household to go to church. It was vain to tell him that this desertion of worship would not affect Mr. Herbert. Mr. Lang swore he wouldn't put himself in the way of meeting him ; besides, though he declared that he was not angry, and was very glad to see the minister there as often as he liked to come, he wished to show Mr. Farrant that his taking the Herbert side of the question did not please him. The abstaining from 'supporting' him by going to church was one means, he thought, of showing this feeling.

When another Sunday came the girls looked at each other, as Mr. Lang muttered something to the effect that the carriage and horses could not be used.

'Surely, papa, you are not going to keep us all away again to-day,' said Isabel. 'It shows how much Mr. Farrant understood your hint, too, for he expressed sorrow at our being kept at home by the weather!'

'O! we must go to-day, Mr. Lang,' put in his wife.

'Go, if you will. But my carriage and horses don't stir, I can tell ye. I am not going to be taxed with driving nine miles and back every week, not I! I will have my own church in my own place, I say, and I'll let them see I will, too!'

It ended in the young people's riding. Mrs. Lang, Miss Terry, and the children had the service at home.

While Isabel waited after church for her brother to lengthen her stirrup, Mr. Herbert left Mrs. Vesey, to

whom he had been speaking, causing Isabel to doubt if he meant to notice her or Kate at all, and approached her. Now, he had a trick of smothering what would have been a sunny smile, but the very effort to restrain it curled his lips, and it was still a smile ready to break through the clouds and be very brilliant. Isabel, regarding him keenly, knew this expression ; she took courage, and offered her hand.

‘Do you know I thought you were not going to speak to any one of us,’ said she.

Then he laughed, but the light had vanished—the laugh expressed annoyance rather than pleasure.

‘So, then, you are angry—you wont shake hands?’ she said, rather uneasy, but striving not to show it.

‘Yes, I will,’ taking her offered hand, first in one and then in both his. ‘I can’t afford to be sulky just now, if I were inclined—I must pocket my pride. Isabel ! I must soon go back to the station. I have serious thoughts of shutting up shop here, and taking my sister there. How do you think it would suit her?’

Isabel here pulled away her hand, and without assistance mounted her horse, and as she did so, said—

‘Not at all. *You* may go—perhaps we shall all be more peaceable without you. Mr. Budd will never resist our party without yourself to support him. Leave your sister, and go to your flocks! Leave the roads and bridges to your betters. I don’t believe really that you understand anything about it, or care. What *can* it signify to you, personally?’

‘Nothing. It will make no difference to me as an individual. If anything, your father’s plan might accommodate me more. But the other is clearly, indisputably, the right side for the public. You don’t think me wrong in this?’

Isabel's steed pricked up his ears as Willie and Jem led their rough ponies out. She curbed him for a moment, and said quickly, in her winning way, as her friend Mrs. Jolly called it,

'If I don't think you wrong, I wont say that you are right.'

Then she touched the horse's neck with her whip, and went on a few steps in a fidgety canter, which bid fair soon to be a fast gallop. But Mr. Herbert was soon at her side, and caught hold of the pommel.

'Don't be in such a hurry—I want to speak to you ; I never get a sight of you now. Seriously, I do think of going to the station. I see not how we are to exist at all, if we don't.'

'What ! are *you* turned croaker ? You are the last man to give in to the dismal cry which the very parrots seem of late to have learnt. For my part, I believe it will do us all a great deal of good,—these bad times ; we have all been speculating and extravagant. Depend on it, Mr. Herbert, it is only one of your English clouds ; when it clears off, it will show us the real brightness of our skies.'

'Ha ! very pretty—all very well. I am glad, however, that you take it so, and keep up your spirits.'

'O, I always do that. I can't grow miserable just because wool is down, and bullocks wont sell.'

'If neither wool nor bullocks sell, what is to become of us all—you and Kate included ?'

'Never mind ! we shall do very well.'

'Hem !—Well, it is not fair to infect you with my gloominess.'

'No ; but I will willingly give you some of my cheerfulness. . . . I wonder,' she added, quickly *changing* her tone, and shaking her head, while the

colour mounted to her forehead, 'I wonder how you can stand such ridiculous, rattling nonsense as mine. Times are seriously bad, but——'

The boys now looked back, and called their sister.

'Isabel!' said Mr. Herbert, 'one word on another subject; Lynch has asked me to beg for him. Why does not your father let him marry? I really believe it would secure him a good servant in the fellow, and save that poor girl.'

Isabel shook her head. 'It is no use; it cannot be. She must go out to service; papa can't afford to keep her on the farm, and the more people interfere, the worse for Lynch. Now, good-bye; will you come to-morrow?'

'No.' Mr. Herbert removed his hand from the saddle, and drew up his head. 'No,' he repeated.

'Yes, do.'

He half smiled.

'Mr. Farrant is coming; join him!'

'No,' in his most decided manner. 'It is impossible!'

'Good-bye, then. A pleasant journey to the station,' and she kissed her hand, and cantered on.

Isabel had delayed giving Ellen Maclean notice to go, from a dislike to tell her so, and from some undefined hope, that better conduct and more steady industry on the girl's part, might render her stay possible. A vain hope. She only grew odder and wilder. Mrs. Lang was extremely angry, and insisted on her being sent home. Isabel felt herself that, under present circumstances, it would be desirable for both, if Ellen were sent out of Lynch's way. It kept him in constant hot water, if he thought her ill-used, or if he suspected that Venn had any chance of success with her. It

would be very desirable if the girl could go into service somewhere. But the only place Isabel heard of, where a girl was wanted to nurse a baby, was not such as made it desirable for Ellen to be in. However, she must leave Langville ; and Isabel on this Sunday evening, gave up joining the family walk, in order to have a quiet and uninterrupted talk with her. The girl cried bitterly when told that she must go, and after letting Isabel talk some time without any answer, she said, 'Very well, she would go home now. But she wasn't going to stay there.'

'Why, Ellen ? Why not try and please your step-mother, and work for her ?'

'Miss Isabel ! wont you please ask the master for the ticket, only the ticket—the blessed ticket, and all would be straight ? Don't you see, Jack and me, we're fond one of another, and if life is hard, we could bear up together. What harm would it do to any one, for him to marry me ?'

'It can't be, Ellen. You must wait till Lynch has fairly earned his ticket. His conduct is not such that his master will go out of the way to recommend him, and he does not choose to have any more married couples here.'

'He allows Venn to marry if he likes,' the girl said.

'Yes ; if you will marry him, you may.'

'I'll die sooner ! It's all a plot, I know. Every
* one turns against Jack, I know ; most of all, that villain. Let them take care, though. Even the wild dogs will turn and bite in the death-throe. A time would come——'

Then suddenly throwing herself on the floor by Isabel, and catching hold of her dress, the girl looked *imploringly* into her face.

‘Oh, Miss Isabel, get me a place anywhere, and I’ll work, indeed I will; only let us have the ticket afterwards. Well——’ she added, after looking earnestly at Isabel. ‘Well, I’ll go home, I’ll do anything; I’ll go home this very night.’ And she rose and turned away, but returning, held up her hand.

‘Mind what I said! don’t be after driving a man desperate. Keep Jack out of punishment, and I don’t care what comes of me. Poor girl! poor Nell, the world is hard, but you’ll be happy yet, you will.’ And so saying, she persisted in going at once, and no argument or persuasion from Isabella could restrain her. There was a curious vein of something like insanity, or lack of sense, which ran through the girl’s mind; and when the fit came upon her, reasoning was vain. All that Isabel could do, was to set one of the servants to watch at a distance, and it was a kind of bare comfort, to hear that she had been traced to her father’s hut. Isabel hoped she might keep her promise and work, but even that might not ensure kind treatment from her violent stepmother, who had an antipathy to the girl. This woman did not bear a good character.

Curious stories were whispered about as to her former life. She had been a prisoner, and lived as servant with the canny Scotchman, Maclean, who in his first wife’s lifetime was overseer at Langville, and what was called a respectable and well-to-do man. But when the mistress died, leaving this little child Ellen, about whom she had always been anxious, discerning something not quite right in her mind, everything went wrong. Ellen’s grief was excessive, and seemed to increase the disorder. The father sank into despondency, and his affairs went badly, till he

was induced by evil counsel to marry his servant. From that hour, misery and dissension took possession of his hut. Maclean was a changed man. He and his master had quarrelled, and he no longer acted as overseer, but took some land on a clearing lease, and removed his goods to the settlement where he erected a hut. It was to this home the girl went on leaving Langville.

CHAPTER XIV.

BREAKING THE ICE.

THAT same Sunday evening, the master of Warratah Brush had been sitting for a very long time, as if communing with his own thoughts, and from his look they were grave ones. Miss Herbert, having long since finished the sermon which she made a point of reading every Sunday, had watched him anxiously. She had arrived at the conclusion, growing on her for some little time, that her brother, to whom she was sincerely attached, was not quite happy. Some change which she could not describe, or attribute to any one thing in particular, had crept over him. It might certainly be the general panic which now came home to him, yet it was not quite like him to sit down in dejection under a monetary trouble. Rather she would have expected him to rise with twofold energy to meet and grapple with the difficulty.

At last she could bear it no longer, and at the risk of a short answer, she broke the lengthened silence by saying, 'So Mr. Lang is still in anger, and keeps away from church to punish us! I suppose he thinks he makes us very unhappy!'

No answer, only a darkening of the face.

'Do you mean to keep it up? Though, why do I ask? Of course you can't do otherwise. It is for him to come round with apology. Of course it would not

be possible for us to think of going there, or making the smallest advance. I observed that you gave the girls a cut to-day. I was amused at your being driven to play the agreeable to Mrs. Vesey, though.'

'Had you waited five minutes more, you might have observed that I did not give any cut.'

'Oh!—and I dare say received none, from that quarter! So you spoke after all, and Issy's eyes did not wander and seek you for nothing. She is anxious enough to be friendly, it seems, and made all kinds of excuses to me for her papa.'

'Did she?'

'Yes; but I received them very coldly. Of course, I am sorry for this misunderstanding; in our small set, it is very unpleasant. Yet, I must own, John, I am not sorry that something should intervene to stop your intercourse with that girl. It will not do now; she is grown up.'

'It did not need this row to bring about that, I assure you, Mary; you need not trouble yourself on that score,' he said, half-bitterly and half-sadly.

'Why, she's very fond of you—very,' returned the sister, uneasily; for she never could bear her brother to be hurt in his own esteem.

'Fond! I don't doubt it. Fond of an old uncle or grandfather. To be sure she is!'

'Well, and that is but natural, John! I mean, it is just as well, for it would have been awkward if she . . . I heartily wish,' she interrupted herself angrily, 'I do wish that Mr. Farrant would be quick and bring things to a point. Not that I can ever think it tells well for his taste or judgment. A pretty rattling clergyman's wife she will be.'

'I have heard you hint all this before,' Mr. Herbert

said, rising and walking about, looking down on the ground. 'But, Mary, do you from your heart mean it? Do you apprehend that Mr. Farrant is paying attention to her?'

'John, judge for yourself! I only ask you to look with your own clear eye and good sense, and tell me what is taking him there every day in the week? What induces him to be so interested in her improvement? Why, his very sermons seem to me to be meant for that family; and I know, I heard it from Kate—who is, by the way, a perfect sieve—that Issy takes notes of these sermons, and that she is much affected by them, and, as Kate says, gets full of new notions in consequence. I only wish I could think better of it; but I see so many points in her character which I do not like, that . . .'

'My dear, I don't think you know Isabel. You know nothing of her, and are prejudiced by her manner, which may be unformed, but . . .'

'My dear John, I assure you I have taken pains to try and know her, not only by talking of her to Kate and to Miss Terry, but you might have seen, had you observed, that she and I happened to be pretty much together lately.'

'I saw it with pleasure . . .'

'Yet, I must say—it is my duty to tell you, John—of course you can act as you like,—but I must say that I find in her a great deal of that very spirit, that identical disposition which you most dislike and dread; and Mrs. Vesey's coming here only increases and encourages it tenfold.'

His steps became quicker, he threw back his head, biting his lips, and showing symptoms of great annoyance, but he said nothing.

A sound of horses' feet in the yard reached them.

'Well,' he said, quickly, 'you need not be troubled, there is no chance of any greater intimacy between us, and rest assured I am not a man to be taken in. I have had my lesson, one never, never to be forgotten. Here is Farrant. Now, Mary, order some tea at once.' And he walked out, apparently relieved, to greet their guest, who had fallen into the habit of taking their house in his long round, having every second Sunday a service twenty miles off.

'Mr. Herbert threw off all gloom, and made himself particularly agreeable. Each time he caught his sister's eye fixed on him he redoubled his efforts to be gay, and to show how much he liked their visitor. When Mr. Farrant rose to go, Mr. Herbert accompanied him to the stable, and even walked on by his side, 'to put up the 'slip-rail' firmly,' as he said.

At parting, he patted the clergyman's horse, and, after a little clearing of his voice, he said—

'Farrant, I am about to ask a question. If you don't wish to answer it, say so. Have you—any motive—any reason in particular, I would say, for your frequent visits to a certain house? I have a strong reason for asking, being, as you know, an old friend, a kind of hanger-on or uncle—and—owing to things I have heard, I wish to know—if you have any decided reason for going there, or if it is merely chance.'

Mr. Farrant's face flushed up, but after a moment's pause, he said, 'I did not suppose I had done anything to awaken suspicion. The fact is—I am awkwardly situated—yet, I may say so much in strict confidence to you. Yes, there is a reason—a motive.'

'Enough! I thank you heartily for your confession,' and Mr. Herbert seemed about to turn away; but Mr.

Farrant said, 'I had before thought of asking your advice, knowing you to be an intimate friend of the family—but all—everything—is so very uncertain yet—that—in fact—you understand when I say that I have a reason, it only implies—my own wishes, nothing more.'

'I understand! But you will succeed. Good evening! Thank you.'

'Mary!' said Mr. Herbert, as he took his candle to retire to his room for the night. 'Am I grown a very old-looking fellow? Am I so very much older than our parson?'

'I suppose you are a few years, perhaps four or five years older than he is. But as to calling yourself old-looking, it is folly. You never looked better in your life, John. Mr. Farrant is very well indeed, but look at him by you. You are far taller and more manly, and handsomer too—though that way he has seems very attractive to people. You don't choose to try to make yourself pleasant; if you did, you could succeed.'

'One is apt to forget how time goes on. But now I awake suddenly to the fact that I have been here between five and six years. However, there is some hard work before me, I can see,' he presently added, with forced animation, 'These are not times to add to one's expenses and cares. We must be very careful, or I don't see how we shall weather the storm. I hear that Lang's affairs are in an ugly state. Budd, too, is very hard up, and that last crash in Sydney has destroyed all confidence. The fact is, we have been going ahead in the most reckless, thoughtless way as a colony, and now comes the crash. We shall live to see many changes, if we can manage to sit it out ourselves; and,

luckily, as I have always kept within bounds, and left that sum safe in England, we are likely to be better off than our neighbours."

It was about this time that the Bank of Australia failed, and its fearful consequences to the numerous shareholders added considerably to the universal distress and want of confidence.

A phantom seemed to hover over the land. Old-established houses were failing everywhere. There was no sale for anything, no money and no credit. People who had begun to build fine houses had to withhold their hand. Everywhere unfinished buildings proclaimed the dismal truth. Throughout the length and breadth of the land arose a low prophetic cry of coming distress.

A change came, entering the very heart of society. The independent and haughty egotism which the untroubled prosperity of years had engendered gave way. People began now to tremble, and to feel there was a God. In times of distress we all remember this, and while churches were necessarily left unfinished from lack of means, the services and ordinances of religion appeared to be more appreciated and sought. The clergy felt that a path was thus opened to their ministrations. Hearts were softened, new ideas and principles were received. But though, in speaking of this season, it is hardly possible to pass this phase in the life of the colony in silence, it does not belong to this story further to enter into particulars. Suffice it to say, that the prospect of actual ruin stared many a hitherto wealthy family in the face. And this dread was felt in the district of Bengala. It was playing a *desperate game*; to give up was to hasten the dreaded

hour of doom. So each one tried to deceive his neighbour and himself. The ball must be kept up by whatever means. They dared hardly diminish their households, or put down an extra horse, for fear a neighbour's attention should be drawn to them and their weakness suspected.

So Mr. Lang, aided by a naturally sanguine temper, shut his eyes to danger, and busied himself to make the best bargains he could, and to gather enough to pay off the immense mortgages with which he had burdened his property. Mrs. Lang's whole energy was devoted to save on the one hand and to spend on the other—to make a show with small outlay. Above all, she desired to marry her daughters before the hour of ruin struck, and besought her husband at whatever cost to keep up his establishment yet a little longer, and furnish her with cheques for the milliners. If once Kate was Mrs. Fitz, and Isabel Mrs. Farrant, she should be comparatively relieved and content. She might have wished for something better a short time ago, especially with regard to Isabel. Yet, she reasoned that this was better than nothing, and Isabel had not the beauty of her sister. Mr. Herbert would have been a better match, but he was not liked by herself or her husband, and besides, she began to give him up altogether, for had he thought of it at all, he would have come forward before. Anything was better than to sit down and think; so constant parties and meetings were encouraged between the neighbours. yet time went on, and still the Herberts came not; and except a hurried meeting in the churchyard,—for there was no more going to Warratah Brush, since Mr. Lang persisted in forbidding the carriage being used on a Sunday,—they had no intercourse whatever.

Mr. Farrant gained golden opinions by proposing a service to be held for the benefit of Mr. Lang's people, in a rough and unfinished building, originally intended for a store. Certainly the distance to Bengala was great, and prevented many of the labourers from going to church, especially the women. Mr. Lang, though deprived of his bridge and road by the final decision of government, resolved to have 'his' church, in which laudable undertaking Mr. Farrant encouraged him, though he tried to put it on other grounds than to 'spite' Mr. Herbert. He said that Mr. Herbert would rejoice in the building, and would, he was sure, be ready to give his share of help. It was quite a different thing from the bridge. But Mr. Lang could not, or would not, see this. 'Herbert and Budd wished to concentrate all the advantages to Bengala, but he would show them that he had his own views, and there should yet be a church and a township, too, at Galoola.' The worst of it was, it was so hard to raise the money just then, and building a church was so expensive.

Mr. Farrant thought that a temporary building might be erected at very small cost, of wood, which might be far more churchlike in form than the usual smooth, shapeless brick buildings. He drew plans, aided by the ladies, and it became a favourite scheme. There was a clever workman and carpenter among Mr. Lang's men. To him was entrusted the execution of this work, under Mr. Farrant's orders.

Mr. Lang forbade any assistance being accepted from Mr. Herbert or Mr. Budd. He asked the Veseyas, as they had appeared to approve and would benefit considerably. But the answer was a loud laugh at the absurdity of the idea 'in these bad times.' So *they* were forced to let it creep on very slowly, and

meanwhile Mr. Farrant assembled a congregation, as before said, every other Sunday, on the Langville estate.

It was a great comfort, but Isabel was unhappy at this further estrangement from their old friends. As she said, she always liked to carry out her ideas ; in plain English, she liked to have her own way. And she had settled it would be such a good thing for Mr. Herbert to marry Miss Terry, that this hindrance to her plans was deeply annoying. Some way must be found to restore peace ; but musing long and often did not bring any light on the subject.

CHAPTER XV.

"COME BACK."

ONE morning, on crossing the hall Isabel saw Mr. Fitz at the front door, holding his own and another horse. He said that his sister was gone into the drawing-room; he would lead her mare to the stables himself—he had to pass that way.

‘Would he not dismount?’ Isabel asked. ‘The man would be there in a moment.’

Mr. Fitz said he had a commission for his brother-in-law further on, he would execute that and then call for his sister. He bowed and rode off; and Isabel, hearing by the voices that Kate was in the drawing-room, was meditating whether she might not escape and leave Mrs. Vesey to Kate, when the door opened and both ladies appeared. Retreat was now impossible. Mrs. Vesey put up her glass to look at her brother as he rode slowly down the road.

‘Ah, poor Arthur, he is so sulky—so wretched—at being sent on instead of coming in. Now, do you know, I came on purpose to ask you all to Vine Lodge? Ah! here is Mrs. Lang herself. Only think, Mrs. Lang, of our being so atrocious as never to have asked you to our cot. But now I am resolved to have the whole party—every one, including the piccaninies and Miss *Terry*, boys and all. Room! never mind that. There

is the verandah. The more the merrier always. I shall have every one in Bengala—Jollys and Herberts, and the noble Captain, and Budds—and who else is there ?

Mrs. Lang began to try and excuse herself. She hardly understood the manner of the invitation. She thought that, as Mrs. Lang of Langville's first invitation to Vine Lodge, a proper note on satin paper was due ; at all events, if not written, it should have been couched in different terms. But, for Katie's sake little objections must be waived. 'Mrs. Vesey was very fashionable,' &c. All this passed slowly through Mrs. Lang's mind. Mrs. Vesey saw her hesitation.

'I will take no refusal—you are all to come. The fact is, you and the Herberts are not to keep up this quarrel. It cannot be. I must be the mediator ; I have set my heart on his coming.'

Mrs. Lang bridled up a little, and began a sentence two or three times while she played with her cap strings, but the vivacious lady allowed no pause. By fluency of speech she overcame, so far as to exact a promise that as many of the party as possible should go. Mr. Lang might be induced, as Mrs. Vesey made such a point of it. Mrs. Lang did not quite like all this, she was naturally punctilious and sensitive about proper respect, but she consoled herself by the idea that certainly Mrs. Vesey courted them very much—and Mrs. Vesey was *somebody*. Though she did not dress extravagantly or live in any style whatever, and was always obtruding her 'poverty,' yet Mrs. Lang was sure that she was somehow or other a person of consequence, simply because Mrs. Vesey assumed to be so ; she sat pondering over this, observing Kate's flush of pleasure, and comparing her height

with that of Mrs. Vesey, and thinking that certainly Kate was the prettier of the two, only she could not talk as fast; then, casting a glance at Isabel's grave face, she could not decide whether she was annoyed or not. Mrs. Lang's observations and conclusions were put an end to by her being very suddenly asked in a persuasive, coaxing tone, if she could not oblige Mrs. Vesey by letting her have half a sheep?—some of that incomparable, delicious mutton that only was seen on Langville table. It would be such a kind, neighbourly act—such a charity! and Mr. Vesey would have some wethers in less than a month to repay Mrs. Lang with.'

'Mrs. Lang's words and ideas flowed more easily when brought to a given practical point. Mrs. Vesey was welcome to some mutton. Mrs. Lang suggested that, as they had no sheep at present, they might very easily send to Langville and get a constant supply of fresh meat. Mr. Lang had before done this for a neighbour. It would be cheaper to a small family like the Vesey's to have it in this way—so much better than having to live on salt mutton till another sheep was wanted. Nothing, however, was further from Mrs. Vesey's intentions than running up a butcher's bill with Langville.

'O dear no!' she answered, quickly; 'no odious dealings and bills and that sort of thing between friends. Fancy—Vesey, debtor to J. Lang, Esq.—Horrible! I have a notion that fellow—that Venn of yours—is much too sharp for poor ignorant creatures like us; a friendly interchange and accommodation now and then is delightful . . . but—so you *will* oblige me, dear Mrs. Lang, with a little of your excellent mutton? and, by the bye, the receipt for that very particular pudding

which the grand signor deigns to approve. It should be called Herbert pudding, you know (nodding her head at Isabel). 'If you want to please a man, give him a good dinner.'

Isabel was going towards the door, but her mother passed and signed to her to remain in the drawing-room. She would fetch her receipt book, she said; in the meantime, would not Mrs. Vesey take off her hat?

Isabel obeyed as to remaining in the room, but she left her sister to carry on the chat. She sat, grave and silent, resting her head on one hand, while with the other she twirled a pencil.

'What do *you* say to it, Miss Isabel Lang?' asked Mrs. Vesey, after a time. Kate was much amused at Isabel's stare, and owning herself ignorant as to the subject of their conversation.

'O, I can hardly believe that—your sister acts well. I think the conversation had too much interest for her not to hear. Am I not right, Kate?'

'I am not sure—I don't know—' Kate began; but was interrupted by Mrs. Vesey's exclaiming, 'And who is this? Can it be Arthur already? No. What a gay place this is! One is sure to see all the world here.'

Kate smiled in assent, and looking round at her sister, said—'It is only the clergyman. He comes daily to see his parishioners hereabouts.'

'Indeed!' and Mrs. Vesey, following the direction of Kate's eyes, saw Isabel's rising colour, and a rather quick opening and shutting of a book.

'Indeed!' repeated Mrs. Vesey.

The gentleman was soon in the room—cheerful, gentle, and courteous, as usual, with that quiet anxiety to please and give no offence which almost

invariably insured his being liked. Isabel was nearest to the door, but he passed her to greet the elder sister first; asked for Mrs. Lang while he shook Mrs. Vesey's hand; and lastly, had a long reason to give Isabel, why he came at all;—some difficulty about the girls' school sewing, which he thought his kind friends at Langville could help him in—he remembered Miss Isabel Lang talking about it one day.

'No, it was Miss Terry,' Isabel remarked; 'she was telling us of a specimen book and certain work-bag, which was given at a school she knew—but Miss Terry was engaged just then.'

Mr. Farrant did not seem, however, to be in a particular hurry to leave—he could wait till school hours were over, and he took a seat near the table at which Isabel was sitting.

'Is that sprig of bushflower invariably good for—nervous headache or low spirits, or whatever that numb, creepy, dull sensation may be termed?' Mrs. Vesey asked presently.

'That flower in your button-hole, I mean, Mr. Farrant, in answer to his look of inquiry, and she put up her glass as if to see it more clearly. 'It *must* be invigorating and refreshing, indeed!' she continued—'Directly it appeared in the doorway, Miss Isabel Lang's drooping head was raised, and the pale face . . .'

Isabel half rose in evident annoyance and distress, while Mr. Farrant smiled, and began saying he was much flattered and pleased; but glancing at Isabel and seeing plainly that she was not, he took out the little flower and approached Mrs. Vesey.

'Can you tell me the name of this flower? it is a new acquaintance of mine,' he said; 'and, by-the-bye, have you any roses to bestow on my garden?'

A long discussion soon arose about shrubs and plants, which continued till they were summoned to luncheon. Mrs. Lang had her receipt book ready, and Mrs. Vesey's attention was devoted to her directions about sauces and puddings. Isabel carved, laughingly refusing Mr. Farrant's help, because 'he certainly did not know a leg from a shoulder;' he confessed his ignorance, and turned to Miss Terry about his girls' sewing specimens, while Kate whispered, grumblingly, at the children for being so impatient and hungry, shrugged her shoulders at Isabel's large slices, and looked ever and anon at the window 'to see if the boys and papa were coming,' she said.

The meal was over, however, and no further addition was made to the party; Mrs. Vesey began to wonder where her brother could be, but amused herself by looking over Miss Terry's specimen book and admiring the beautiful sewing, while all sorts of rules and prizes were canvassed by the ladies and the clergyman, and Isabel only checked her eager talk, after a long hour, with a sudden exclamation—

'Kate! lend me your guinea-fowl seal, will you?' Then learning where to find it, she went away to the work-room, opened a desk, which, to say the truth, was but seldom used, and after scribbling over and then destroying several pieces of paper, she finished a short note, folded it, and finally was careful to make a very neat and clear impression with the particular seal she had chosen.

The note was as follows—

DEAR MR. HERBERT,—When the mountain would not go to Mahomet, why, Mahomet went to the mountain. Can't you exercise a little greatness of mind? Is

there no fountain like the one you told me of once, where forgetfulness of the past might be secured by a draught ? Do not forget us quite ; though I leave you to solve these contradictory requests, and to read my true meaning in my seal, for the safe keeping of which, I enclose this in a double cover.

From your friend and teaser,

I. L.

This note was given to a boy who was sent to Bengala on an errand to the forge, with special directions to deliver it safely, and Isabel, with a heightened colour, sat down to consider her bold stroke. The voices from the parlour reached her, for doors at Langville were not made to be shut. Isabel was no great thinker in general ; at least, she did not much practise self-introspection. But she had naturally a clear, straightforward mind, which was intolerant of mystery and doubt. The habit of the family did not encourage reserve either. Everything was discussed and brought to light in a matter-of-fact way, leaving little or no room for unconsciousness of what was passing. Mr. Farrant's and Mr. Fitz's visits were openly talked of, and ascribed to the several attractions of Kate and Isabel. For some time Isabel, being in no ways predisposed to the subject, only treated these remarks as a joke ; but lately it had struck her that perhaps there was truth in the assertion. Certainly Mr. Farrant did come very often, certainly he was very agreeable and very attentive, and several times he had gone out of his way to seek her, when she was sewing and enjoying a chat with Miss Terry, or taking a quiet stroll with her. He had urged her to practise her voice, and *had succeeded* in making her sing with himself and

Miss Terry. That very morning, when Miss Terry had retired with her pupils, some jokes had passed on the subject; somehow they did not do so before her, seeing she disliked it, and Mr. Lang had fired up at the notion of any one's taking his darling from him. He had asked Isabel if she liked Mr. Farrant. Isabel, after considering a little, said, 'I hardly know; I suppose not quite, for I have never had any quarrel with him.'

At which speech there was a general laugh. 'Well! I mean it. Whenever I really and heartily like any one, we always come to some hot words; it is my way. I don't feel as if I quite knew Mr. Farrant as yet, but of course I see he is very nice, and very pleasant, and so on.'

The notion of 'Issy's quarrelsome temper' tickled her father much. He said he wished all quarrels were like hers, and then kissing her, told her she was much too good for them all, and that he did not believe in all this gallivanting; but still, if mamma was right, it behoved Isabel to look out and see what she did like, and so on.

And now, sitting apart in the quiet work-room, she tried to get at her own feelings. Fond of active pursuits, and her perfect health of body saving her from any shadow of morbid discontent, and the habit of taking refuge in the erection of airy castles, where happiness is one day to triumph,—Isabel had enjoyed the present, without thought for the future. She had looked forward to marriage at some future time as a needful step in life, because she found that others did so, practically, as well as theoretically; and besides, her mother always spoke of single life at a certain age as something oppressively dreary and unfortunate. Aa

to the notion of falling in love, 'Isabel had treated it as a great joke ; and whenever Kate had indulged in her small way in this fancy, Isabel had rallied her well out of it, as something weakly and absurd. Lately, however, the question had in several shapes come before her. First, she had been much struck with the girl Ellen Maclean's decided and strong attachment to Jack Lynch. Then, seeing poor Tom Jolly's sorrowful face when Kate showed him coldness, made her think there was 'something in it.'

Now, here was Mr. Fitz, said by all the authorities to be 'in love' with Kate, and Isabel watched and observed the symptoms of the feeling with keen curiosity, and came to a conclusion that, 'if that was love, it differed very considerably from the feeling which Ellen had or Tom either.' It might be fashionable, well-bred, polite love. If so, and if Kate liked it, she hoped all would go smooth. But she had begun a little to suspect the perfect disinterested sincerity of Mrs. Vesey's friendship, and when she remembered the chance of poverty hanging over their heads, she felt uneasy about Mr. Fitz, and once or twice tried to give Kate a hint, but it would not do. Kate responded with so much warmth, and with so much more reserve, too, than was usual to her in such affairs, that Isabel feared her sister's happiness was more involved than she had thought. Then, Mr. Farrant ! could it be true that his visits were on her account ? There was an uncomfortable twinge at the very notion, immediately followed by a flush of very natural pleasure and gratification, for Mr. Farrant was one she liked and admired, and from whom she had learnt some new things. In two ways he had a new *source of power* over Isabel. It was the first time

she had ever heard any impressive preaching ; also his and Miss Terry's was the first music that had touched her. His singing especially attracted her. She was not quite sure that in other ways she found him so agreeable as others seemed to do. 'There can be no need for hurry,' she mentally ejaculated. 'If it is really needful to have to do with marriage and all the odious preliminaries, there is no use in bothering myself beforehand about it.' And, accordingly, she gladly allowed her mind to escape from the perplexity and wander into regions better suited to her taste. It was far pleasanter to dwell on the scheme she had drawn up for others, to manage for Mr. Herbert and Miss Terry, in bringing them together, and helping each to appreciate those qualities in the other which she only fully knew. There would be difficulty and opposition from her father's wrath against the gentleman, and, as she expected, disapproval from Miss Herbert. For although that lady had come forward very much to Miss Terry, Isabel could not suppose she would entertain the idea for a moment of her brother—a Herbert!—marrying a governess.

Here then was a field for all her energy and determination of character ; and what a happy thing it would be for poor Miss Terry ! How delightful hereafter to talk it all over, and receive the grateful thanks of both these friends ! It would be such a triumph over a certain Mr. Pelham, the gentleman who had married Miss Terry's sister, and whose bad temper and jealousy had been the cause of forcing her to gain her own livelihood. Isabel's warm heart had been deeply stirred against the origin of her friend's many trials. But when the day should come for sending a piece of bridecake and cards with 'Mrs. Herbert' on them, all

these wrongs would be avenged ! Already her busy fancy had settled that the principal part of Miss Terry's *trousseau* should be made at Langville. Much as Isabel hated sewing in general, she should sit at this for hours with pleasure. Fascinating day-dreams ! The first step, she had just taken in sending that note. She dreaded the result more than she chose to confess even to herself. But there was no more time now for thinking. She was summoned back to the drawing-room. Mr. Fitz was returned, and very merry and gay they all were, till it was time for the Vine Lodge people to go. Mrs. Vesey reminded Mrs. Lang that they were all 'due' on the day after the morrow, at which Mrs. Lang tried to laugh and feel complimented. But a troublesome doubt if these really were fashionable manners, if it were compromising the dignity of 'Mrs. Lang of Langville,' gave an awkward stiffness to her manner, and caused her husband to say with one of his merriest laughs—'Mamma don't fancy being 'due' to any one, like a parcel of goods. Don't trouble yourself with so many curtsies, Mrs. Lang, like a Muscovy duck out of water ! By Jove, that Mrs. Vesey is a jolly lass ; free and hearty, and up to a joke. Eh, Issy ? what do you say ?'

Then, on Mrs. Lang saying something not very distinct about 'invitation' and 'everything changed !' he put his arm round her waist, 'Come, old girl, leave out the starch and you'll do ! And if I were you, I wouldn't go to Vine Lodge. You and I will stay at home ; and I say, Mrs. Lang, perhaps Miss Terry will make us custards, eh ?'

CHAPTER XVI.

A BUSH NYMPH.

IT was during the very time that Isabel had retired to write her note, and indulge in a little thought, that a horseman passed through that part of the bush which led by a short cut from Langville to Bengala. Here the trees stretched their branches wider than usual, from their being more cleared. There were fine specimens of those giants of the eucalyptus tribe, gandy with their flaunting streamers of coloured bark. Here and there a dark, grim iron bark reared its head, while close beside it was a low clump of sober myrtles and tea shrubs. The graceful growth of the exocarpus, or native cherry, gave a touch of relief to the unvarying height and straightness of the forest trees. Then there were the plants, sought by children, bearing a pleasant berry called 'five corners,' with blossoms like a fuchsia; while a rich vetch-like creeper, covered whole masses of underwood with its bloom of amethyst. By this was a banksia, or bottle-brush, and other plants too numerous to name. Add the flight of brilliant coloured parrots which were ever crossing the sight, and the intense depth of blue sky, and it will give some notion of the scene. Though all these things were less noticed by the rider than the distant groups

of half shy horses, or some of the wild cattle which roamed, it was said, through this extensive forest at will, and only found a boundary in the sea-shore. The gentleman in his loose and light shooting dress, sitting his horse easily, if not carelessly, whistling at times some pretty waltz, was somewhat a pleasing object. If not strictly handsome, there was an 'air' about him, and an expression of good humour, which at a first sight would be apt to attract, though a narrower inspection might discover indications of something not quite so agreeable.

It was no other than Mr. Fitz, who rode on upon an errand of Mr. Vesey's ; and as he idly whipped the branches, or pushed aside his small Manilla hat, his eyes wandered quickly here and there, showing more habit of observation than reflection. Not a lizard, or an ant-hill escaped him. Suddenly his horse shyed on one side, and he uttered an exclamation which soon changed to words to this effect :

'By Jove! Here's a Bush nymph, by all the powers. Aye, aye, I've seen that face and head before, or I'm not the man I think.'

Then after stroking and quieting the startled horse, he leant over the saddle, and said in an off-hand, easy, somewhat flippant tone,

'Good day! It is so rare to meet any one hereabouts, that I was nearly as much taken aback as—as my horse! Hem. . . . Is there anything the matter, Miss . . . I forget your name, though I know I have had the pleasure of seeing you before. Not ill, I hope?'

This was addressed to a girl who was seated on a stump, rather withdrawn from the track, and sheltered by a tree. She was bent together, and seemed to be

crying bitterly. She did not answer him, but raising her head, gazed on him with mournful surprise, mixed with fear. As he suddenly dismounted and approached her, this look of fear increased, and she made a movement as if to run away, but the soft tone of his voice apparently stopped her.

‘Although I do not know your name, I am sure I have seen you. Don’t be afraid of me, my poor girl! Ah! no one who has once seen that face, and that hair, could forget it! You are one of Mr. Lang’s people, eh?’

‘That I am not!’ she answered quickly, and again burst into tears, to hide which she stooped her head, and her long yellow hair fell like a veil over her.

‘Indeed! Dismissed, I suppose. Too pretty, perhaps! Come now, suppose you confide in me. Look up; am I anything very grim and formidable? Tell me if I can help you.’ And he seated himself by her, giving his horse a long rein, to allow of his cropping the grass.

She stopped crying presently, and stole a look at him. Apparently this begat confidence, for she pushed back her hair, and looked demurely down on the ground.

‘Have you far to go?’ he asked.

‘No further than where I am;’ and again the tears sprang forth.

‘Come, tell me all. Do you know your way home? Have you lost yourself? Perhaps you can’t find your way home?’

‘No, that I can’t.’

‘Where about is it?’

‘Where? Nowhere on earth, I’m thinking!’ she

said, wildly. 'But ride on, sir; ride on your way. It is ill keeping you here on a bootless errand. Ride on!'

Then she caught up her hair, and began quickly to weave it into a rich plait, winding it round and round her head. He watched her, and talked to her in a quiet and soothing way, trying, indirectly, to ask her history. She cast shy and stolen glances at him from time to time, which gradually became more confiding and less frightened. It did not require much art to win poor Nelly's confidence; and as he now diverted his eyes from her, and was apparently looking on the ground, and playing with his whip, she ventured to observe him more at ease. A few kind words, slightly touched with a little flattery, opened her heart, and her tale was soon told. Her dead mother, the stern father, the cruel step-mother, her best and first friend, Jack Lynch, and Miss Isabel, Lynch's troubles, and desire to get the ticket, even Venn's hated advances,—by degrees he heard, and understood all.

Then he began to speak, and he talked of hope. He had some interest with Mr. Lang. He had very little doubt but that, somehow, they could get the ticket or leave for the marriage. He was intimate with the 'great folks' in Sydney, who had power to grant such leave, and to make the prisoners free. This case should be stated. As for herself, he bade her take heart and hope. Numbers of people would be only too glad to get her as a servant. In fact, now he thought of it, he himself would very soon want some one to wash, and bake, and mend his clothes, sweep his hut, and keep it tidy. He was going to live at a station, somewhere up the Hunter. Would she like

to come and do all this? No one should interfere with her, or serve her ill.'

She looked up delighted, but then her eyes grew dim. 'She couldn't leave Jack to go so far as all that. She was the only comfort poor Jack had; she would not desert him.'

'But when once you are there, I shall do my best to get 'Jack' there also. I shall propose an exchange with Lang, and as you say he is no favourite, no doubt, for a consideration, I can get him assigned to me. Do you understand? And then—there will be no difficulty. I can grant leave to marry, or get the ticket.'

She grasped his arm as she looked eagerly at him, till tears rolled down her face. She was breathless with excitement.

'Will you consent?' he said, smiling.

'*Will* I——? O, 'tis my dead mother will watch over you, and bless you. 'Tis herself will bring the blessing, and the good word of the blessed Virgin and all the saints! And you'll see, and they'll see, that I can work; and Jack will be a clever man, as he is, sir. He can fell trees agin anybody, and he can plough, and do a many things about a place. He's a clever chap is Jack Lynch, and he's the man will know how to get things neat and handy about him—that is, when his heart is aisy like. Bless you, sir, for a kind-hearted gentleman!' And rising, she folded her arms across her bosom, and with a touching grace, dropped a low curtsay.

He was pleased, and he would not let her go yet. He talked of their future plans, till her whole face was bright and beautiful with joy. Meanwhile he advised her to go home and do whatever her parents desired, anything, except to marry Venn. That she must

resist. He advised her to take the offer of being child's maid to a woman near the settlement, which she said her father had thought of ; and he promised to keep his eye on her. If any one dared to ill-treat her, he should come down upon him, and he would send her word when she could journey to his station with the drays. After some more assurances of protection on his part, and repeated blessings on hers, they parted. She went home, and he proceeded to deliver his message. Her voice, clear and sweet, was raised into snatches of song, and reached him for some time. One thing gave him rather a turn, for just as she dropped her last curtsey and left, and as he rose from the hollow tree on which they had found a seat, a long snake crawled out and glided swiftly across his very path. He vaulted into the saddle with a shudder and rode on fast. On the whole, his ride had added to his already good spirits, and when he returned to Langville, he was even more than usual, the 'life of the party.'

The little settlement or township of Bengala consisted, as said before, of a few straggling slab huts which had one after the other risen round the temporary church. One or two large and well-grown trees which, favoured by the clearing around them, spread their branches out wider than the usual run of the eucalyptus tribe, gave a picturesque appearance to the place. The broad, ill-made road swept round outside Mr. Herbert's paddock, and his house and other buildings were all in view, the undulating cleared land about the farm being bounded by shelving hills, wooded of course with the everlasting blue and white gums. There was a store kept by the schoolmaster's wife, and a blacksmith's shop ; the *remaining* huts were occupied by persons who had come for

the chance of work, one being a shoemaker, another a currier. The Macleans had just taken up their residence in one of the poorest of these habitations. The roughness of the building was now, however, much hidden by the abundant growth of a water-melon, which had thrown its long, but short-lived branches quite over the roof.

It was early morning, the dew still lying refreshingly on the melon leaves and on the little patches of grass beneath the trees. Everything was fresh as yet, and feathered musicians came to relieve the chirping night choir. Cockatoos in heavy flight were already on the wing. 'Lories' and bright 'green leeks' fluttered about the gardens; while the peculiar crack of the stockman's whip gave warning to the scattered bullocks that their rest was at an end. There was an animated meeting between mother cows and their calves, after their night-long separation; while Mr. Herbert's swineherd, or 'pig boy,' might be seen driving his squeaking, grubbing herd to the 'flats,' where they were to pick up a repast for themselves.

Mrs. Maclean was putting aside the remains of their breakfast while her husband was sharpening a knife, casting stern looks, meanwhile, on Ellen, who was seated on a low stool, her head buried in her hands, and crying bitterly. She had returned, as advised by her new friend, Mr. Fitz.

'And sure ye're a disgrace to the woman who bore ye—a wild, headstrong young colt—that needs a stiffer bit and bridle nor ye get. And I'd be ashamed if I was your own father there, that wouldn't give you a rare good beating this minute, and see who would be master!' said Mrs. Maclean, in a harsh, high-pitched voice, every now and then clenching her fists at the

girl, as she came at all near her in the course of her domestic occupations.

‘Will you obey your lawful father’s commands, I say?’ demanded Maclean himself, in a severe manner. ‘Will you give a fair answer to the man—or will you not?’

‘Not if I am torn by dogs or beaten to death!’ said the girl, raising her face, and speaking in a low, determined voice.

‘Say that again!’ said he, rising quickly, and seizing a whip which stood in the corner.

‘You may take my life! I don’t care! and it ain’t the first blood has been spilt by one that owns your name!’ answered she, quickly.

‘What do you mean?’ shouted Mrs. Maclean, giving her a severe cuff, and looking frightfully angry, and then pouring out a torrent of abuse and wicked words.

‘You leave her to me this time, missus,’ said the father, hardly less excited than his wife.

‘I shall give her one chance more, and then if she don’t conform, she may’

‘Father, let me be! let me stay here—starve me, if you will, work me like a slave, I’ll do it,’ the unhappy girl said, ‘but don’t ask me to have him.’

Something in the man’s face, as she looked up at him pleading for mercy, turned back the tide of her full heart, and the earnest, imploring expression, which had for a moment succeeded the taunting, excited look was instantly changed into one of dogged sullenness. One low, half-suppressed scream, and her hands tightly pressed on her head as if to shield herself while the whip whizzed over her.

‘None of your gammon or promises about work ;
you’ll take the man at his word, or’

‘I never will ! never ! never !’

The words were repeated in agony again and again,
while the infuriated man beat her cruelly, goaded on
by the shrill croakings of the woman, who, if report
said true, would not have been sorry were the whip
to give a fatal blow.

•

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LONDON THIEF SEEKS AMUSEMENT.

THE sun rose higher and higher, and in the hottest parts of the roadside the locusts made their sharp saw, heard by all and seen by none. A guana lay on the top rail of the fence, with its crocodile-like mouth wide open, basking in the fervent heat ; then at a noise of some one coming, it ran quickly up a tree, its long tail looking like a snake as it curled round and round. A stockman, with his short-handled and long-lashed whip, dismounted, and removing the upper bars of the fence, made his horse jump the rest. After replacing the bars, he vaulted nimbly into the saddle, and with a sharp but furtive look, scanned the bush on either side, then rested his whip-handle on his knee, and appeared to think, while his horse shook his head at the troublesome grasshoppers that hopped and chirped so incessantly, bounding even to the face of horse and rider, and causing both to feel the sharp and stinging blow. The man rode on leisurely till he came to thick scrub, and then he seemed to look warily around, and listen. He pulled up at last, and gave a long whistle, in imitation of a curlew's cry ; again and again this was repeated, and then a slight movement was seen in the bushes, and a girl half raised herself from her screen.

'Jack, I'm too stiff to move towards ye !'

The man quickly dismounted, and leading his horse, stepped towards her ; but the horse was restive, and would not advance, which caused delay. In the meantime, Ellen raised herself quite, and on seeing who it was, said in a vexed weak voice, expressing more than mere disappointment—

‘ Bill ! why I thought you were Jack Lynch himself, and sure I heard his whistle.’

‘ His whistle, Nelly ! why, it’s any man’s and every man’s whistle, for all I see ; but sure I thought you were some lame foal or wild beast among the bushes here. Whatever are you hiding here for ? Lucky I didn’t ride over ye !’

‘ Maybe’twas no luck at all, at all ! But ride on, ride on. I am just sitting here because I choose it,’ said she, leaning back again on the stone she had chosen for a back cushion.

‘ That wretch of a woman has been playing off on you again, I see ! Why do you submit to it, Nelly ? Were I you, I would cut and run !’

‘ And where would ye run to ?’

‘ Where to ? why to a hundred places ! Bless me, there’s plenty of places for you to go to if you will seek them. I heard say you were going to Allen’s—and a better thing you couldn’t do now ; and then, I say, Nelly, I saw a friend of yours last evening. Says he to me, ‘ Do you know one called ‘ Nelly ?’ ’ ‘ Aye, and so I do,’ says I, and then he tells me he has engaged you to be his servant, only not being ready just yet, he wants you to bide quiet here for a bit. You can’t do better than wait at Allen’s.’

‘ I shan’t go there, so hold your tongue, Bill ! I know who wants me to go there, and who is thick with Mrs. Allen, so I do.’

‘Well ! I speak for your good, I am sure ! Come, Nell,’ he added, seating himself beside her, and leaving his horse to bite a little grass ; ‘come, now, keep up your spirits. You might make your choice of all the men on the farm.’

‘And that same is just what I have done, Bill.’

‘Well, I know you have, and I’m willing to help you to it. But you see all depends on that ticket, Nelly. That ticket must be had, and then all is trotting ground.’

‘Ay ! the ticket, the ticket !’ she repeated absently.

‘Well—and the way to get it is for Jack to keep out of punishment, and you know, everybody knows he’s a chap of hot blood, and not apt to take things quietly, and when he sees you moping about and knows how bad you’re served and how they speak of you, it aggravates him. Ho, there ! keep quiet, Peter, I say !’ The horse, however, was worried with flies, and not inclined to obey till after a good deal of patting and coaxing, when he again betook himself to cropping any tender bud within reach. ‘Well, you see, Nelly my dear, as I was saying, there’s the ticket must be had, and to gain that—peace and quiet work ; and now we are hut mates I have means of knowing something of his mind,—the burden of his song is, That girl ! that girl ! if she would get a place and keep it.’

‘He didn’t say the like o’ that, Bill ; don’t think to blarney me.’

‘He did, though—a hundred times over he said it. Now just keep your pretty face out of his way for a while—go to Mrs. Allen’s ; and let him go straight to his work with only his own burden to bear.’

She did not see his side look—so keen, so subtle,

so quick in its scrutiny of her whole bearing—not a sigh, not an impatient gesture, not a shudder of pain, slight and suppressed as it was, escaped him. He saw the weals, the swollen face, the acute agony it was to move at all, and he had also seen her in her beauty, with her hair plaited and braided, and her slight but rounded figure set off by a neat dress ; he had heard her songs—she was called by the men Lynch's skylark, and he knew the love of that man for her, and he knew how she was desired and sought by another. His whole nature prompted him, not to love her, not to win her for his own pleasure, but to thwart and circumvent others, to plot, to triumph in secret at the success of his own cunning, and at the same time to receive the bribes which Venn and now another had offered for his help. It was quite an exciting event, and he resolved that the highest bidder should win the prize.

'Poor girl !' he said, 'poor child ! you are ill ; but just—can't you walk, d'ye think ? Do try—I'll help you. Come to Allen's—you know 'tis not far off this. I'll warrant she'll give you something to do you good now ; and you'll cheat the old sinners yonder, and do Jack's heart good this night when I tell him where you are. 'Tis his first wish you were settled to some work, and could hold up your head against the world. And the ticket 'll come, Nell, see if it don't.'

She drew back as he attempted to put his arm round her.

'Let me alone !' she said, bluntly ; then, after a pause—'Tisn't much faith I put in you or your words, Gentleman Bill ; you've boasted too much of your own sly doings. But I don't know but what your words are true now. Are you sure Jack would be easier if I was to go *there* ?'

She looked at him as if to read his answer in his eyes, but he did not raise them.

‘Not a doubt of it,’ he answered ; ‘and I must go, so if you want my help, girl, make haste.’

‘I have seen others at the place!’ she said, musing ; ‘’tis a plot, ’tis a plot,’ she exclaimed, presently. ‘But oh, dear me, oh, dear ! and I *am* an unfortunate girl !’ and she began crying like a child.

‘Easy, my dear heart, easy ;’ and this time he did put his arm round her, and held her fast. ‘Come along, my sweetheart ! You must, or you’ll die outright here.’

He forced her to rise ; she did not resist, but the moving caused her to groan—‘O, Jack, could I see thee, I’d die the next minute with pleasure ! Leave me here ! leave me, I say !’

‘No, no, you shall be put to bed, dear, and see what a kind woman she is, and to-morrow you’ll be as blithe as a bird again. . . .’ And so coaxing, and soothing, and helping her, with one arm supporting her round the waist, and the bridle slipped over the other, he led her on ; now bending down the intruding boughs which bounded back again so as to lash poor Peter’s face not a little, now looking from under his eyelids at her, or marking his way in the thick and tangled forest.

Faint and weary, and sobbing still as if her heart would break, she reached Allen’s hut, too miserable and ill to note the nod of secret intelligence that passed between her conductor and the woman who was sitting outside the door at work.

They laid her on a bed and gave her something to drink, and soon the heavy long-drawn breath of the *sleeping* girl reached Mrs. Allen and Bill, as they *talked* in the outer room.

‘All right,’ said he, chuckling. ‘As for him, this to him,’ and he put his fingers to his nose in that fashion which signifies utter contempt for some one.

The woman nodded, and said, ‘Ay! Ay! but don’t blab, you know.’

In another moment he was galloping fast through the bush, to make up for lost time. Having ascertained that all the horses were right, he returned home just in time to find his hut-mate Lynch finishing his dinner.

‘Here’s baccy for ye,’ said he, turning out two or three figs of tobacco; ‘a smoke will do ye good, man, and I’ll treat you. How long since you got a bit up yonder?’

‘Never since that hound got into the store;’ baccy I don’t look for, not I; but for fair rations I do, and I declare that the road-gangs can’t fare much worse than I do. For what I get is no good to me, it aint fit for a slave!’

‘Why don’t you complain to Lang himself, eh?’ asked Bill, with one of his side looks, and low inward laughs. ‘If it were only to keep up your strength for the clearing work, he would wish you to get good meat, I should say. However, here, this is meat and drink;’ and he put some tobacco in his hand. Lynch eagerly took it, and soon the hut was full of its fumes, while Bill eat his beef and damper, and set his hyson on the fire.

‘Good, eh? None of your colonial weed, that! true Virginny ’baccy; and if’—he stopped to indulge himself in a long glance—‘and if you only knew where it came from it, would be all the sweeter. I got it from a particular friend of yours.’

Lynch did not vouchsafe an answer.

‘By the way, Jack, that girl is fairly crazy about you. Bless me, if I was in your shoes, would I do as you do, that’s all? I had the perticular pleasure of seeing her pretty face to-day at Allen’s hut. She’s settled as child’s maid there. Look out for the new ribbons and such like, for Mrs. Allen loves a bit of finery. And a good thing for the girl it is to be in a place; but, as I said before, why don’t you take her?’

‘Why, indeed!’ said Lynch, scornfully, and treading his heavy shoe on the hundreds of unfortunate ants who were swarming out of a log Bill had just thrown on the fire. ‘You know why as well as I do!’

‘Well, I’d see if I wouldn’t out-do the tyrant. Gad, and if he wont let ye marry, a man of spirit has a way before him. Rather than be crossed in my will in such a matter, I would give the slip to any master, and once in the arms of the forest, why, man, you and Nell can snap your fingers at parsons and banns! There’s Rob-heavy, a chum of mine, we came out in the same ship; he’s not blest with my easy disposition, and he got discontented, and had the pleasure of being sent to the road-gang; he got tired of salt beef and hominy and hard work in the broiling sun and his leg ornaments, and what did he and another do but manage to slide off quiet into a thick scrub, where the soldiers couldn’t find ’em, and then ’twasn’t difficult to get their irons knocked off; for depend on it the feelings of the country is in favour of brave fellows like them. And now where are they? Why, scouring the country, dressed as well as a gentleman, helping themselves to the best horseflesh in the colony, and——’

Hunted like wild beasts, to come to the gallows at last!’ said Lynch, gloomily, though he had evidently *listened* with interest.

‘Well, and if so, a short life and a merry one ! Die game, and you are a hero ! or live on, and be beat, and starved, and worn down like an old dog ! But different men have different tastes. For my part, you see, I had enough in that line at home ; I rather took up the steady walk here ; I bowed and scraped to an old lady and got my ticket. I shan’t be long here, though ; I am getting tired of the place ; I shall soon see and get my ticket made out for somewhere down the country.’

Lynch smiled, as he said in a sarcastic way, ‘Change of air, I suppose, for your health !’ Then taking up his woodman’s axe, and followed by his dog, he went to his work, which was felling trees, in which he excelled.

Bill laughed, and laughed again, and stroked his chin as he watched him.

“It will take ! it will work ! Ah ! your big bump-tious spirits are the ones to deal with. I care not which of ’em gets the girl, but if I hadn’t this little bit of business on hand I should get melancholy, I know. Venn thinks he’s sure of her now, and Jack is sure to break his head, and then——”

CHAPTER XVIII.

MYSTERIOUS NEIGHBOURS.

WHEN Mr. Lang found from his half-offended wife that the Herberts were to be at Vine Lodge, he swore he wouldn't go. He had plenty to do and to look after at home.

'How long is this feud to go on, papa?' Isabel asked.

'For ever, as far as I care! I bear no ill-will, not a bit of it! But that confounded Herbert's stiffness and pride shall come down. If he chooses to come here, or make an apology, or show any desire to make it up, well and good. I'll give him my hand and say, Come, my boy, that's something like it. But I'll eat my head if I go one step out of my way to meet him.'

Mrs. Lang also found that her presence at home was indispensable, and no persuasion, even from Kate, would move her.

'Is Miss Terry going?' asked Isabel.

'Indeed I think not, my love. Miss Terry ought to superintend the little girls' studies.'

'Studies be hanged! The little woman shall go, if she likes. Kate, bid her get ready, She shall go in the gig with you. Willy will drive, and Jem and Issy can ride,' said the father.

But Kate returned with Miss Terry's thanks, but *she could not leave home to-day.*

Eh ! what ! But she shall ! D'ye hear, Kate ? Say she must go !' said Mr. Lang, from behind his newspaper.

'It is no use, papa, she wont do what she settles not to do, for any one,' Kate said, rather languidly. 'Besides, did Mrs. Vesey ask her ? Are you quite sure ? It is not every one who expects the governess, and all that !'

'Confound it ! Then stay at home every one of ye. If—if a gentlewoman—a lady—whom I choose——'

'Hush, daddy !' Isabel here put in ; 'don't excite yourself. Miss Terry really cannot go, she says.'

'You are sure she doesn't wish it, Issy ?'

'Quite sure,' Isabel said, rather sorrowfully. 'It is very provoking of her, as I particularly wanted her to come.'

'Then, Mrs. Lang, my dear, she shall remain with us. Her wishes shall be obeyed in my house. 'I shall be delighted with her company. Let's have a good dinner, Mrs. L.'

Mrs. Lang left the room, saying that it was sickening to make such a fuss about governesses, and that she believed the world was turning head over heels.'

Isabel asked her brother Jem to ride with her round by the Jollys. It would not make much difference, and she wanted to see Mrs. Jolly and carry some seeds.

Kate and Willie were to go in the gig.

Mrs. Jolly was looking at her bees. She was delighted to see Isabel. Amelia and Tom were going to Vine Lodge, and they could all ride on together. She and her husband were not going. 'We are too old, my dear ; we like to stay at home best. Very nice people, very gay, and so on ; but we are old-fashioned and simple, and we don't quite understand them.'

When the neat garden was admired, and a pretty bouquet gathered, Mrs. Jolly insisted on Isabel's coming in to rest while Amelia dressed. She divided the flowers, binding their stalks up in ribbon. 'Now, these are for Kate, my dear, with my love. Poor dear Kate! Ah, Issy! what is good for one is bad for another, in this life. No doubt you are all rejoicing, and enjoying this new society; and indeed, I hope it is all as good as it seems, and that dear Kate will be very, very happy. But you must excuse me, my dear, if I, as a mother, don't seem quite so cheerful about it as I should, being an old friend and neighbour. But when I see my poor child's face—poor Tom! Of course, Issy dear, we know that Kate has a right to look high, but——'

Tears dimmed the mother's bright eyes, and Isabel's colour flushed up as she exclaimed, 'I wish she may find that looking high, as you call it, will be as good as—as—Tom! How Kate can prefer that dandy, that cold, quizzing——'

'Hush, my dear! Of course, I think a great deal of Tom, for I know his heart and his temper. But I believe that other young man is very clever and very good-looking; and after all, it is a matter of fancy; and Kate is not to blame—not at all. Don't let her fancy I or any one, even Tom, ever blames her. I believe he would do a great deal to make her happy, and now he is of course very unhappy. His father and I mean to send him away to visit some relations in Van Dieman's land, for a change. Ah! we can't help these troubles. To say the truth, we old folks would have preferred yourself, Issy. You always were a great favourite of husband's and mine—but Tom always *adored* your sister, never had a thought for any one

else, and I really believe never will. I don't offend you by saying this, do I, dear ?

'No ; you never could offend me.'

'Well, my dear, and I hope papa and mamma like Kate's prospects?'

Isabel did not answer directly ; she smiled merrily to herself. Presently she said, 'Do you know, I wish from my heart I was Queen Elizabeth, or as despotic !'

'Bless me, my dear ! what makes you wish such a thing ! Why, she cut off every one's head, and threw people into prison, didn't she ?'

'I should like to be able to give my orders very much, just now. I should like to say to this one 'do this,' and another 'do that ;' and I am very sure it would be for the good and happiness of all parties if some one could set all straight.'

'My dear ! How can you suppose you know what is best ? In these matters, every one is the best judge for him or herself, and one can't be controlled.'

'No ; but there is so much absurd ceremony and reserve, that people don't understand each other or themselves. I should like to say, under penalty of death, You Tom Jolly take Kate Lang for your wedded wife. And then, You Mr. Herbert take Miss Terry.'

'You don't say so !' interrupted Mrs. Jolly, almost starting up with surprise. 'Well ! well ! I am astonished ! that is a thing I never dreamt of.'

'Pray don't repeat it, dear Mrs. Jolly, not even to Amelia or to Mr. Jolly. It is quite my own idea and secret.'

'It can never be—never ! My dear, just consider,' Mrs. Jolly said, gravely.

'But I have considered ; I am always considering it ; and I am sure it is a most delightful and a most

probable thing, and it is quite sure to be, some time or other !

‘ You don’t say so ! And does your mamma know it ? Dear me, how very differently we and almost every one have judged, to be sure ! Well, well !’

‘ Dear Mrs. Jolly, do tell me, why need there be always so much fuss and mystery and misunderstanding in these affairs ? Is it needful ? Why couldn’t Tom, for instance, say long ago—Kate, do you like me well enough to marry me ? And then, at all events, he would have known his fate before he got so deep into it. But so much manœuvring and sighing and talking and stuff seems to me so absurd. Kate says, when a man proposes he is sure to go down on his knees ! Conceive the horrors of it ; I should burst out laughing ! Did Mr. Jolly do so to you ?’

‘ No, indeed, my dear,’ returned Mrs. Jolly, laughing. ‘ He was a plain man, much as he is now.’ It was in church. He was going away to sea the next day. We had known and liked each other a long time. He opened his prayer-book at the words in the marriage service, and laying it on my knee, pointed out—‘ Wilt thou have this man,’ &c. ? I looked up in his face, and seeing there what he meant, I just put my finger on the answer, ‘ I will.’ And that was all ! When he returned from that voyage we married. That was our courting !’

‘ That suits me exactly ; plain and straightforward. After all, what is the use of a man going down on his knees to entreat a person just to obey him ? for that is the real meaning of all the nonsense—‘ Will you be my wife ?’ There’s sense in that. One can look out the meaning of the word ‘ wife’ somewhere,—in the *man’s* eyes and mouth—I should—and there see if it is

written 'slave,' or 'plaything,' or 'helpmeet,' and answer 'yes' or 'no' accordingly. A plain answer to a plain question. Ah, you may laugh, but I mean it. And here comes Amelia, and I see Tom and Jem with the horses. So, good-bye. Good-bye !

'It is really atrocious !' exclaimed Mrs. Vesey, after examining her guests through her glass. 'I had ordered so much meat and pudding, and expected such a host, at least double the number ; and here the Langs can't come, the Budds can't come, Captain Smith, Dr. Marsh, Miss Herbert—I am not quite sure even of the Signor himself ! Well, come in, come in ; I am in a very cross mood ; but come in, pray, and we can twirl our thumbs, at all events. Mr. Tom Jolly, the success of this party rests on you. Here are you, verily our only beau, except Arthur, who will be back for dinner. Very sorry, but he was called away on business this morning. So, you see, you are our forlorn-hope, our *pièce de resistance*—in fact, our all !'

Tom grew redder and redder under this stream of words. He was meditating in his mind whether he might venture to shake hands with Kate, or if he was only to bow.

'Ah ! here is the hero. Here is Mr. Herbert !' called out Mrs. Vesey, and in a moment she had run out to receive him in the verandah. She led him in, and then waving her hand towards the couch on which Kate and Isabel were, she said, 'It is not my fault that Mr. and Mrs. Lang are not here. The fact is, I am a peaceable Christian, and it irks me to have quarrelling among friends and neighbours. Our little district ought to be a perfect dove-cot. Now, let me

beg of you, Mr. Herbert, to lay down your arms and your arguments ; let me have the supreme pleasure of seeing peace established ! Your hand, Mr. Herbert ; Kate, my love, Miss Isabel Lang, I know you will both support me.'

Kate looked extremely uncertain in what way to take all this ; but as it was Mrs. Vesey, it must be right. She half put her hand out, and then with a deep blush drew it back again when she found that Mr. Herbert was making a very low bow. In another moment, he had turned to Tom Jolly, and after a few words with him, they went out of the room together. They met Mr. Vesey just outside, and all went off to the stock-yard, the usual point of interest to the gentlemen. Isabel had turned away and buried her face in a book during Mrs. Vesey's annoying speech. She was very angry indeed. She was sure it had completely undone all the good her note was intended to work. If Mr. Herbert thought that all this was a plan concocted between them, and arranged before his arrival, nothing would make him more angry. To be so turned into ridicule, and to find them so led away by Mrs. Vesey's jokes after his warnings, would hurt him exceedingly.

She sat long ruminating over this, but apparently reading. At last dinner was announced, and she found herself led out by Mr. Fitz, who was full of regret at the tiresome business which had delayed him ; but as he contrived to place himself adroitly next to Kate, who had been taken out first by Mr. Vesey, Isabel was soon at liberty to look about and see what other people were doing. She saw Mr. Herbert, all the gravity and annoyance gone, doing his best to be very agreeable to Amelia Jolly ; while poor Tom listened to the lively Mrs. Vesey, and stole wistful glances towards

Kate. A vacant place was left for Mr. Farrant, but he did not come till long after they had risen from the table. Amelia drew her arm very affectionately through her friend Isabel's, and led her away to a pleasant and secluded seat in a shady corner of the verandah. Here they chatted as young girls do.

'And do you like Mr. Fitz very much, dear Isabel?'

'Don't ask me, if you please, Amelia.'

'I beg your pardon; I meant nothing, I am sure. By the way, I suppose you are very glad that poor Ellen Maclean has got a place, aint you?'

'Tisn't very much of a one,' Isabel said.

'O, I hoped it was! You see, I heard you say how much you wished she was in some steady family, and I told mamma, and she said she would try her as a kitchen-maid. So I rode with Tom to the settlement to see about it, and found she had left her father's. O, what a dreadful woman that Mrs. Maclean is!'

'Yes—well?'

'Well, she said, very gruffly, that the girl was gone to Allen's place, and directed us there. But we could not go till the next day; and then Mrs. Allen said that 'Nelly' was engaged to be servant to some gentleman far up the country, and was to start this very day, I think she said, with some drays.'

'Are you sure? It is very odd I never heard of this.'

'I am quite sure; and I was sorry too, for I had taken an interest in the poor girl's fate and sad story; and I think mamma would have been kind to her.'

'To be sure! The very thing of all others! Gone up the country? Where, and to whom? I must inquire, Amelia; for somehow I dread what will come to poor Nelly. She has not the sense to guide herself,

and is so pretty that every one notices her. It is very odd,' Isabel continued, musingly.

'Ah, there is Mr. Farrant ! I am glad he is come at last,' said Amelia. 'Isn't it very nice to have a clergyman, and such a one—so good, and so kind, and so agreeable ?'

'Well done, Amelia ! String on a few more epithets. Go on—dignified, manly, clever !'

'No, no ; I leave that for Mr. Herbert,' said Amelia, with a little more spirit than she usually showed. 'I don't give him up for any one, after all. Then, I believe I always prefer familiar faces and old friends.'

'Don't you like a variety ? Confess that it is pleasanter to have these additions to our circle.'

'I don't know—perhaps so ; yet I was very well content before. I think we were quite as happy without them, only perhaps I ought not to say so. Then I believe I am stupid, for I confess I don't quite understand all the cleverness, wit, or whatever you call it, that Mrs. Vesey and her brother have. It is true,' she added, after a pause, 'that our society was small ; but, as papa and mamma always said, Mr. and Miss Herbert were hosts in themselves. Papa says, much as he has been about the world, he scarcely ever saw a man he liked more. I don't think these new people half appreciate him, either.'

'Agreed. But, Amelia, I did not know you were such a staunch admirer of his. It is a pity he doesn't know it.'

'Not for worlds ! Goodness ! O, Isabel !'

Both girls gave a start, and looked for a moment rather silly, as they heard a voice they recognised but *too* surely, very near, say, 'What are you two gossiping

about?' and then, from behind the sheltering cedar, Mr. Herbert, newspaper in hand, appeared.

'If you heard yourself well abused, it served you just right, you base deceiver! Do you know, it is very dishonourable to listen?' said Isabel, rallying herself, though covered with blushes. But poor Amelia could not recover so soon. In frightened amazement, she shrank behind her bolder friend as far as she could, and tried to remember what she had said.

'O, were you talking of me?' Mr. Herbert said, coolly, trying to hide a little look of consciousness meanwhile.

'As if you didn't hear! and you are chuckling over it at this moment, forgetting that Amelia's praise—and of course you observed that I did not second her at all—is worth this,' flipping her fingers. 'Why, she praises every one, and, over and above all, Mr. Farrant. She is no judge, so you need not be vain.'

'She judges people by her own heart,' Mr. Herbert said, and at the same time trying to bring forward a garden stool.

'Now don't come here, please. After all that praise, you will be unbearable. I see by your face how it is. We don't want him, do we, Amelia?'

'I want you, however,' he said, seating himself by her side. 'Now, how d'ye do? We may as well shake hands, since it is—how long? since we met.' He took her hand as it lay on her lap.

'Ah, you didn't choose to do that just now!'

'No; not to gratify a vulgar joke,' he said.

'You were very angry, I saw,' she went on, all the more boldly, because in reality she was ill at ease, and wondering if he had received her note.

'Not with you. I admired your presence of mind.

and dignity, and thought it a pity poor Kate couldn't do the like.'

'There now,' she said, pulling away her hand from his grasp. 'You can't be civil without a little bit of rudeness too!'

'I was not rude to you, at all events.'

'As if it wasn't the same thing! You always think because your high and mighty benevolence chooses to pick me out, you may say what you like of my people! Now, I won't have it.'

'Well—come—I beg your pardon for that little slip. Practise what you preach, Isabel. I came here on purpose to see you. Mahomet will go to the mountain, as you desire.'

'Will he?' she said, trying to turn away from his inspection, and feeling very shy, and inclined to run away.

Mr. Vesey here came up to beg them all to join the others; they were to walk and see a certain view,' he said. He offered his arm to Amelia, leaving Mr. Herbert and Isabel to follow.

'Stay a moment, Isabel,' Mr. Herbert said as she rose. He even pulled her gently back to her seat. 'It was like you to write that note.'

'Yes,' she returned, quickly; 'I dare say you abused me well for a meddling, forward girl, unfeminine and all that.'

'I shall keep it always,' he returned, quietly and gravely. 'It is now some five or six years since you and I first made acquaintance, and vowed friendship at first sight. You were a child then; and I was foolishly dreaming, and forgetting that a time must come—' he stopped, and cleared his voice, then went on: 'I assure you, Isabel, I do not desire to have any arguments with your father. But I must have my own

opinions, my principles, and act up to them too. You tell me to come to Langville, and I shall do so, solely because you bid me, and to see you.'

'Yes, yes ; I know all about it ! Come and see me ; and no one else, I suppose ?'

He was looking at her, not understanding her tone, still less the lurking fun in her face, when Mr. Farrant came up to them.

It was the first time he had greeted Isabel ; she blushed a good deal, and more still when she saw Mr. Herbert draw back with cold gravity. 'I am desirèd to fetch you both,' Mr. Farrant said. They all walked on in silence, till Mr. Farrant began some ordinary remarks, which Isabel answered.

The party were standing about the stock-yard and talking of the horses. Tom Jolly was praising his little mare 'Jenny Jones' to Mr. Fitz, and for the moment warmed in his subject, had completely thrown off his usual bashful manner. 'She's out and out the best stock horse in the country, sir ! Why, she seems to know the very beast I want to cut out. How she'll fly after them ! You see, the bullocks will generally make for falling ground—down they go such precipices ! that many a horse can't follow. Bless you, 'Jenny Jones' will follow any herd in the colony. And then to see her when a devil of a beast shies round ;—she wheels in a minute, though at full gallop, two and three times over ; 'tis no such easy matter to sit such a sudden turn—then crack goes the whip, and the beast is cut out as clean as butter. She's the sweetest stock mare, sir, in the district. I wouldn't sell her for any price !'

Every one had now some anecdote to tell of some wonderful chase after wild cattle, or some wonderful

horse. Mr. Farrant remarked to Isabel that it was a natural feeling, that strong attachment which grew up between a man and his horse. As they proceeded on their walk, he kept by Isabel's side. They somehow got round from horses to Miss Terry, and it came out in the course of conversation that Mr. Farrant knew her brother-in-law, and could satisfy Isabel's curiosity in many ways about him, and the conduct which led to Miss Terry's going out as a governess. He stopped himself short at last, apologizing for boring her. 'No,' she said, eagerly; 'it was a subject full of interest for her. She did so pity Miss Terry's having to teach,' and so on. Then she added, with a significant smile, 'that she hoped, after all, the evil would be turned to good. It might end in something not so very bad, after all!' On which Mr. Farrant gave a look of keen inquiry at her. They had loitered on the road, and now found themselves left behind and alone. Isabel was the first to observe this, and she felt rather conscious and uneasy. They walked on in silence for a little while, each apparently busy with some thought. 'I fancy,' the gentleman began, in a low and hesitating voice, 'I fancy that you have some suspicion of—of what I intended to keep a secret for some little time.' She said nothing, not knowing what to say, but feeling very hot and uncomfortable, and angry with herself for not keeping with the others. He presently went on again, but hesitating and nervously. 'I am peculiarly circumstanced. I can't explain—yet—may I ask?—may I trust? Is it too much to——?'

'Don't! not now, please!' she interrupted, earnestly; but hardly knowing what she said: 'we are so far behind!'

‘We can soon overtake them,’ he said gently. Then as if seeing her distress, he changed his tone. ‘I beg your pardon! I fear I have bored you! It was a wrong time. I leave myself in your hands; some day—some time—soon—I hope I shall be able to explain and speak plainly.’

‘O, there they are!’ she said, with a long breath of intense relief. Then she checked her hurrying steps, feeling it was not fair or kind towards him! She had stolen a glance, and her quick eye had detected symptoms of agitation or disappointment. She did not wish exactly to hurt him; only if he would but wait till she knew her own mind better—and only would use few words, and not make speeches, how thankful she would be!

‘Yes, here they are,’ he echoed, rather sadly, she thought. ‘Thank you for your kind—but no! your own generous warm heart needs no formal words of thanks: it will best plead for me, I know.’ He offered his hand as he spoke, and she yielded hers to its gentle but warm pressure.

‘Come here, Issy,’ called Willie; ‘here’s the bell bird.’

They stood on the edge of a deep, dark gully, descending some hundred feet with but little slope. At the bottom was a narrow and shallow stream, which in some parts formed a chain of small ponds in hollow basins of rock. Gigantic lilies, with their rich coronals, reared their stately heads amid the feathery foliage which abounded, and the sweet monotonous note of the water-loving bell bird alone broke the deep silence.

‘A frightful place to come upon without warning, when chasing bullocks!’ remarked Mr. Fitz.

‘It is the same gully in which the waterfall empties

itself some fifteen miles north,' said Mr. Herbert. 'We came upon it four years ago, quite suddenly, when hunting the kangaroo. No one seemed to know the existence of the fall, and it is a very considerable one too.'

'A lonely place to set up one's tent, isn't it?' said Mrs. Vesey. 'But if we go on a few steps we shall come upon a human habitation. Parishioners of yours, Mr. Farrant, which I dare say you know nothing about. Charles and I were walking here last week and found it out. Rather rough neighbours I suspect they are.'

'Yes. I see no good, aw—Laura, of putting one's self into aw—that sort of—of trap—at all. By Jove! the old lady is aw—something awful—Miss Lang; I assure you she is.'

Some of the party wished to turn back, among whom was Mr. Herbert. For, he said, 'Many of these gunyos were the resort of bushrangers, or sly grog-shops. Unless on business, or an errand of duty, he never cared going too near them.'

But some thought it an exciting adventure, and said it would be cowardly to return. It was proposed for Mr. Farrant to be spokesman, and to introduce himself as their clergyman. 'What do you say?' he asked Isabel; and she, conscious and shy, hardly knowing what she did, turned round to Mr. Herbert and asked him to come. He looked pleased, and was about to draw her hand on his arm, when Mr. Farrant looked back. 'Miss Isabel Lang comes with me, I believe?' They were all forming into pairs, it seemed, that each lady might have a protector. Mr. Herbert immediately withdrew, motioning for her to go to Mr. Farrant, and *remarking*, with an indifferent, dry voice, 'I shall stay

here. If there is any danger, cooee-ee, and I'll come.'

So saying, he caught hold of a branch and swung himself down for a few feet on the giddy precipice, to a little level platform, from whence he had a beautiful view, range after range, of the deeply blue mountains, and where he could trace the source of the stream, here and there tolerably deep and full, and then again broken by rocks so as to form pools.

The rest of the party, headed by Mrs. Vesey, Willie, and Jem, followed the track, which presently led them away from the edge of the gully into dense scrub, where the native currant bushes and five corner plants abounded. Soon a few blackened stumps were seen, telling of man's work, but already the quick-growing creepers had fastened their tendrils and gay blossoms over them, half hiding their ruins.

Then the place became clearer ; several large trees had been cut down, a stack of bark was piled up, and a rude attempt at a shed, in which lay a broken cart, and a tethered bullock standing near, bespoke the neighbourhood of human beings.

In another moment, as they turned a sharp corner, they met with a welcome more lively than pleasant. About half-a-dozen dogs of all kinds, but chiefly a mongrel breed, half dingo and half cur, filled the lone place with their snaps and growls, and the gentlemen had enough to do to keep them from their heels and the ladies' skirts.

A hut, or rather a gunyo, was seen, its high-pitched gable, formed of two very large sheets of bark, placed together like a card house, and a rough attempt at a chimney at the side, of loose stones unmortared. Standing by its side, a magnificent red cedar rose lofty and

proud, affording strength, and shade, and shelter. Such as the dwelling was, there were evident signs that it had been inhabited for at least a season. A large pumpkin ran along the ground, and catching a broken post, which seemed to have served as a tethering post, it climbed from thence to the cedar, and from that again threw out its clinging arms to the back roof, on which lay three or four very large pumpkins. There was also a few feet of ground which had been cleared and drilled, and where a dozen or so of Indian corn-stalks raised their green leaves and hung their tasselled blossoms. Some ugly Cochin fowls, tailless, and with abundant legs, pecked about, while a tame cockatoo reared his crest, and joined his shrill cry to the yelping dogs.

‘I wonder if any one is here!’ Mrs. Vesey said.

As she spoke, a woman with her hands shading her eyes appeared from behind the hut. She had on a man’s cabbage-tree hat, on the top of a mass of rough and disordered red hair. She wore a short bedgown and stuff petticoat, and in her mouth was stuck a short black pipe, from which came the fumes of inferior tobacco.

‘Good day!’ said Mrs. Vesey. ‘What a charming place you have here!’ While the boys beckoned to Mr. Farrant to come forward, and whispered sagely that there was a man ‘behind there; they had caught sight of him peeping at them.’

‘Down, ye noisy devils!’ called out the woman, at the same time throwing some pieces of wood at the dogs, which proceeding procured a cessation of noise. But at the same time a much more formidable guardian appeared and took up his place by the woman;—a fierce bull-terrier, with flaming but half-closed eyes, and a wide, open mouth, displaying a row of formidable teeth,

over which the lips never closed. A low growl rather alarmed Mrs. Vesey, who quickly retreated, saying—

‘Pray, my good woman, keep in that dreadful, beautiful, awful, charming creature! I adore dogs, but I should be afraid of that pet of yours. How do you do, Mrs. ——. You see, in taking a walk, we have come on your house. It is a curious place.’

‘Get in, ye varmin,’ the woman said, kicking the formidable brute till he skulked behind her, though still keeping up the low, ominous growl.

‘Pray, ma’am,’ said Mrs. Vesey, suddenly hitting on what she thought a very happy idea, ‘have you any fowls for sale?’

‘Depends on what I’d get for ’em. Don’t care to sell; but, seeing we’re short of tea, wouldn’t care to swop with ’ee. A quarter chest—and, I don’t care, ye may take the lot of ’em.’

‘A thousand thanks! But it will be needful for me to put it on paper, and do a sum, before I can agree to such a liberal offer.’

‘Please yerself—’taint none of my seeking;’ and the woman turned as if to go.

Just then a shrill, wild scream rose, as it seemed, from the hut. It was a signal for all the dogs to begin again; but the effect of that cry was apparent on every one of the party—most of all, Isabel was startled.

‘Good gracious! what is it? I know that voice!’

There was a sound of scuffling; a dull, heavy noise, and then a gruff voice uttered a whole volley of oaths, and a man, whose hairy face wore a most sinister expression, put his head out of the door.

‘Send they quality folks away, ye Judy, or I’ll have Bluebeard at their throats! Go on your ways, or it will be the worse for ye.’

‘My good woman,’ here Mr. Farrant interposed, ‘I am the clergyman of this district. I have ridden about in many a corner, but I did not know of your hut. Can I be of any use? I am ready to be a friend to all my flock. What may be your name?’

The woman scowled, and then after an intent survey of the speaker, her face relaxed into a sort of grin, which as soon gave way to an unhappy expression, mingled with distrust, fear and defiance.

‘My name is Judy Brown, gin that’s any good to ’ee. As for a clargyman, us don’t want none of that trade. We are Catholics, my man and me. We don’t ask no one to help us; and I warn ye, if ye come on that kind o’ errand, ye’d best turn home again. ’Tis no place for ye at all, at all!’ She lowered her voice to one of warning at the last, and half pointed backwards with her thumb.

Here Mr. Vesey began to bluster a little, saying that as a magistrate he could not help having an unpleasant suspicion of neighbours who only received a friendly call in such a fashion. He hoped all was right; but he thought it right to say, that now Vine Lodge was inhabited again, it would not be so well for people to imagine that they could do just as they liked—break the laws, &c.

Then the woman began to whimper, rubbing her eyes with her ragged apron. They were only very poor folks, she said. Her husband cut bark, and had been ‘squatting’ there about a year. They hurt no one, and wished no one to interfere with them. They were hard-working people.

‘Have you any children?’ said Mr. Farrant, taking out his pocket-book to note down the facts.

‘Three, please your honour. Two lies there at the

foot of yon white gum, and one is up the country keeping of sheep for a gentleman.'

Isabel observed a turn in her lips, very much like a suppressed smile, in spite of the whining voice she had so suddenly assumed.

With a quick impulse, and under pressure of a fleeting suspicion she could not quite realize, she said—

'Does any one live here besides you and your husband?'

The woman gave a searching glance at her, and then hesitating, first said 'No one,' then corrected herself, and said, 'Forbye a girl, just to help me 'bout the work, and so on—a flighty, do-nothing lass, she is, too—and'

But again that cry rose, and now it sounded like 'Help!' The woman looked round uneasily, and said 'it was a neighbour took ill with a sun-stroke.'

A small, mutilated white terrier just then burst out of the hut, and made its way snuffling, and whining, to where Isabel stood. She, naturally fond of dogs, stooped to notice it, remarking that it seemed to know her, when again there was a suppressed noise, and the dog listening, bounded back and disappeared within the hut.

The man who had been half hiding all this time, now showed himself, and in a very daring and insolent way, asked what they wanted. For as to selling fowls, they didn't profess to sell poultry, and as to the minister calling, once for all he begged to say, no such a man was wanted there; and if folks didn't know better than to go where they was not wanted, they would some day find they'd best have minded their own affairs. He had a carbine on his shoulder and a couple of wanga wangas and an opossum in his hand.

No one felt disposed to dispute with him or seek a further acquaintance with the mysterious gunyo.

So wishing him and the woman good day, they all turned back. Some faint and confused noise of speaking, and as it seemed even hot argument, reached them, and once again they were all startled, as the wail of a dog echoed far and wide. It was evident that the poor animal had received punishment for something.

‘I wish we had some of the police here,’ said Isabel. ‘I have a strong impression that something is going wrong there. Kate!’ she said, turning round and waiting for her sister, who with Mr. Fitz was a few steps behind, ‘Kate, did you notice that dreadful scream? Didn’t it remind you of Ellen Maclean, as we have heard her cry out, when ill-treated by her wretched mother?’

‘It was only a child, I think,’ remarked Mr. Fitz, quickly; ‘or, didn’t she say some one was ill or delirious? What did you suppose, Miss Isabel Lang? How could this Ellen somebody get here, and why?’

‘It is a sly grog-shop, and something worse,’ Mr. Farrant remarked. ‘It will be well to give a hint to Captain Smith of the existence of such a nest. Rather too near to be pleasant I should think, Mrs. Vesey?’

When they told Mr. Herbert all that had happened, he said he could have told them the sort of thing they would find; he had seen many of them. They were generally the very scum and outcasts of the people; their hut is the rendezvous for all the bushrangers or runaways. They made their living ostensibly by cutting bark or sawing wood; but generally there was a deep excavation under their beds, where the grog was kept. The police were afraid of them, if not actually bound by bribery.

As he walked on by Isabel and Mr. Farrant, still

talking of these wild characters, Isabel said, 'I can't get it out of my head that it was poor Nelly's voice!'

'That was fancy,' Mr. Farrant answered; 'for I know the girl is gone with some drays to a station very far up the Hunter. I couldn't make out who it was she was to live with; but I hope it is a good arrangement.'

'Under present circumstances it is not bad for her to be out of this neighbourhood,' Mr. Herbert returned. 'She is a singular being,' he went on; 'there is something very attractive about her.'

As he talked on of the girl, Isabel, always carried away by the impulse of the moment, and under the influence of his old familiar kindness and protection, suddenly put her hand in and took hold of his arm.

He smiled, looked quickly at Mr. Farrant, and then said, as if apologetically, 'She thinks my arm must be at her service; I am a sort of lay uncle, you see. Take care and not be entrapped by little girls in sun bonnets, Mr. Farrant; you don't know the consequences!'

'Is there anything extraordinary in my taking your arm unasked?' she said, trying to withdraw her hand and struck by his manner. But he held it fast, laughing.

Mr. Farrant said something as to its being a very pleasant 'consequence;' and he also ventured on a significant smile, while he said, 'he perfectly understood about it.'

'Understand what?' she asked, with flushing cheeks; and she clung to Mr. Herbert the rest of the way in her shy avoidance of Mr. Farrant.

It might have been this feeling, so new to her, which made Isabel quieter and more silent all the rest of the evening. It was a real pleasure to her to meet her old friend after their late estrangement; and as he

was in one of his most agreeable moods, and talked in his pleasantest way of foreign lands and travels, keeping the conversation thereby off the small and personal topics of the neighbourhood, Isabel felt proud of him, and off ran her speculations on her favourite scheme, so much so that she was rather absent, and, a thing very unusual for her, gave one or two dreamy answers, betraying her pre-occupation.

When the party broke up, and by the doubtful light of a young moon, they set off to find the tracks through the Bush to their respective homes, Mr. Herbert was not sorry that the clergyman found his duties made it advisable for him to return by a somewhat longer round. He wanted to leave a message at a hut which lay more on the road to Langville ; so that he turned off with the Lang party, and left Mr. Herbert to go on alone.

Mr. Herbert left his good horse to find his own way, and gave himself up to a good fit of thinking. He was strictly and peculiarly a man with sensitive appreciation of the honour due from one man to another ; besides his military training, his own disposition pointed this way. Not for the world would he now, having, as he thought, been made aware of Mr. Farrant's intentions, intrude or interfere between him and Isabel. Sometimes he bewailed his own blindness in not anticipating him, and trying to secure the prize so long his own in one sense, that he had forgotten a change must ever come. As it was, he was forestalled ; yet, as an old friend, he had still his own place, which he would cede to no one. Sweet as was her confiding trust in him, it was mingled with pain, for he thought it showed so very plainly the light in which she viewed him,—the impossibility of any nearer tie existing between them.

Then he turned to the parents, and thought that perhaps it was a fortunate thing all hope was crushed.

It would not be a pleasant connexion. Mr. Lang would probably never consent, or if he did, there would be perpetual disagreement. His marriage at all would be highly imprudent just now, and a great blow to his sister. He had considered himself a determined bachelor; all his habits and his ideas had tended to this. Why should he suddenly desire to change? After all, he might be mistaken. His feelings for the girl were probably what they ever had been. Never, till he had heard her talked of for some one else, had he suspected anything more. He might continue to be her friend, and meet her nearly every day; but if she really did marry Mr. Farrant, how would it be then?

He winced at the thought. He could bear to have her as she was—Isabel Lang; he believed he could bear to think of her as nothing nearer to him; but to see her belong to another—to know that his intercourse with her must depend on that other's will—Pshaw! he whipped up his horse suddenly at the thought. Then, cooling down again, he took a cool survey of the case, and before he reached home he had settled his plan. It was by no means certain that Isabella would marry Mr. Farrant. Indeed, he had seen her avoid him and even prefer himself. But, ah! that very avoidance—would he not be glad to see something of the sort towards himself. The very open and frank affection she showed him was against him. However, he would see as much of her as he could. He would observe and watch, and scrupulously abstain from standing in Mr. Farrant's light; though he half wished he had not committed himself by asking any

question. If he found that it was dangerous to himself—there being no question of danger to any other—if the present wild dream did not give way to his foregone habits, he could but leave it all and betake himself to the far-off station. There, it would go hard indeed but he should bring himself to sober sense again.

But the probability was he might indulge himself in the pleasure of seeing and hearing her without harm to himself or any one else ; and that there was no one pleasure he cared so much for, he had pretty well convinced himself during all the days he did not meet her, and dreaded Mr. Lang's anger might even make any further intercourse impossible. So Mr. Herbert returned in a particularly amiable mood—disposed to be very kind to his sister and sociably tell her about the day. He even remarked how pleasant it was to find her there to welcome him, instead of a bare and comfortless bachelor's room. Miss Herbert was surprised and relieved. She had been unhappy at his depression, and now finding him disposed to see all things hopefully, and to talk as he used to do of always remaining a bachelor, she rallied all her cheerfulness, and to hear and see them that hour before they parted for the night, one would have supposed no care or trouble entered into their quiet and uneventful life.

CHAPTER XIX.

A BREEZE BEFORE BREAKFAST.

ISABEL did not forget that strange and piercing cry they had heard from the Bark Hut. Then she remembered Amelia's news of Ellen Maclean's being engaged as a servant to some one at a distance.

She rose very early and went out towards the men's huts, hoping to learn from Jack Lynch, or some one, what was the truth about this report. Lynch was not to be seen, but 'civil' William Smith, alias Gentleman Bill, who always seemed to be at hand when anything was wanted, and had an answer ready for every one, now came up a little behind, according to his custom, his hat off, and his head bent forward between his shoulders, and eyes apparently on the ground.

'Was the young lady seeking Lynch? Sorry he was gone for the cattle and would not return till night. Could he do anything, or give any message?'

'No, thank you. I don't suppose you can help. I want to find out where the girl, Ellen Maclean, is at this moment.'

She did not see the quick, scrutinizing glance which seemed to scan her through and through, but she heard him say presently, as if trying to recollect, 'She was at Allen's at the township—that is, it is a little out of the road down by the creek. Allen works for Budd, and I saw Nelly Maclean minding Allen's children.'

‘When was that?’

‘Some days ago, Miss, let me see—it——’

‘Are you sure she is there now?’

‘Well—not exactly. For I did hear she had met with a situation somewhere a long ways off. They said that she was going along with some drays.’

‘Where?’

‘I am sure I can’t say, Miss. ’Twas no place anear this.’

‘Did her father know of it?’

‘That I don’t know neither, Miss. But I think not. I think he was all for keeping her about here; and I knows that Jack Lynch hadn’t heard nothing about it; for, says he to me last evening—he and me live in one hut now, Miss—Bill, he says, I shall just give a look in at Allen’s as I pass homewards. It is long since I saw the girl. And I says, ‘Well, and so do,’ says I; ‘but mind yourself, Jack, and don’t be after time now, and be a aggrawating the master again.’

‘Thank you;’ and Isabel was just going on, when she heard her father’s voice, apparently in great anger, and looking around she saw that many of the men, having come in for breakfast, were hanging about and staring with surprise and curiosity. Anxious and troubled, for these rows were but too frequent, she hurried on to where Mr. Lang was standing, and was much surprised to see a man who for some time had lived at their other place, Westbrooke, one whose somewhat dogged, surly honesty had been admitted by his master, by the very fact of leaving him in sole charge of the place, with the cattle and horses. About horses he was particularly clever, and was generally entrusted with the rearing all the colts. Charley *Brand*, called ‘Bran Charley,’ or ‘Big Charley,’ was a

‘character,’ and in some way a good deal looked up to by his fellow prisoners. A man of few words and uncommon physical strength, he went on his way with the most unfailing punctuality, interfering with no man, scarcely even volunteering a remark.

In old days, when the family had lived at Westbrooke, that being the home-farm and Langville a mere out-station, Charley Brand had, in his own fashion, noticed the children, and had become a favourite of theirs. It was Isabel he especially picked out; but he was kind to all, and had given them many a ride on his sorrel mare. She was therefore about to greet him cordially as usual, but the words did not pass her lips. The man did not even see her; there he stood, hat in hand, his long, thick hair moved by the hot wind which was rising, his stock-whip dropped, and lying on the ground beside him.

He looked his master full in the face—a look not pleasant, and it grew darker and darker, till Isabel could see how angry the man was getting at every gesture and word of her father’s.

Mr. Lang, also a stout man, but of lighter build than Brand, in his suit of white linen and small Manilla hat, paced to and fro before the stable-door, now smacking a whip sharply, now bending it double, now shaking it in threat, as in his stammering, excited way, he poured out his wrath, supplying all hiatus with oaths and abuse. It is a miserable liberty for any one to be able to speak as his temper prompts him unrestrained. With Mr. Lang there was no one to call him to account for words. His servants were prisoners, with no power to give warning, and only too happy if the anger vented itself in that manner, and stopped short of actual punishment, which it

sometimes did. But though this was the case with the majority, there were a few exceptions, which unhappily Mr. Lang did not note—a few to whom these hot words were as poison. He never paused to read the countenance of the man he was abusing.

He did not intend to punish Brand; his services were too valuable, and indeed there was something in the man which forbade the idea; but in his keen disappointment in finding a colt, which he had expected to prove valuable, seriously lame, he eased his mind, according to habit, and was now in the middle of his scolding harangue, or what he called a ‘good blowing up.’

Charley’s arrival had been unexpected. He was rather a noted character, and it being also breakfast-time, there was quite an audience. Even the household servants and the boys were there. The blood rushed into Isabel’s face. She could not bear her father to expose himself so—to give way so completely to passion, and to use such words. She felt lowered, sorry, and, as she looked at Charley, even afraid.

‘You big, greedy, beef-eating rascal! You are as fat as a prize ox. You sit in and gorge, and neglect your duty. Hang you!—you’ve ruined the colt, and you’ll smart, I promise you. You’re a knave, an impostor, sirrah—a smoothfaced, lying rascal! What could be expected from a swindling, thieving, confounded jockey boy! I’ll do for you, as sure as my name’s Lang! You’ll see—you’ll feel! I’ll make an example of you! You don’t suppose I’m going to stand it, do you? And how long—if your confounded tongue can speak truth—how long has the beast gone lame? Speak out, can’t ye?’

‘Yes, I can speak out, and I mean so to do, Mr.

Lang, when for lack of breath you have stayed your oaths and language misbecoming a gentleman. I let ye have the bit—I just gived ye the reins—for to see what you would please for to say. And now, sir, seeing as how I can't write, except just my name, I comed up here myself, that ye might get the quickest intelligence of this here haccident, which I was all so sorry for as—as—but that's neither here nor there *now*. The day afore yesterday 'Prince' was so well on his fore legs as e'er a colt among 'em all. Yesterday evening I zeed him limp. I drove them all into the stock-yard right away, and examined this 'ere consarn, and I believe it may be some poisonous bite, for 'twas all of a inflammation, and sceeing all foments and so on did no good, what did I do? I cast about, and remembered as how David Wheler was reputed as clever about them kind of things, and anyhow your honour would know and judge. So I left William in charge, and off I set, and never stopped for sup nor bite till I rides in here; and this here is the wages I gets, as all can bear me witness—a welcome I'll not be likely to forget too soon, either.'

'What! you threaten, do you? you insolent old methodist; for you've treated us to quite a sermon this fine morning.'

Here a laugh was raised and passed round, faintly, by the audience, but a look from Charlie Brand stopped it. Isabel's hand was pressed on her father's arm.

'Don't, papa; pray don't provoke him! He is tired—perhaps hungry. Wait till you are both cooler, please!'

'Go in, child, go in,' Mr. Lang said, impatiently; then, with affected hilarity, 'Well, sir, don't think to alarm me with your scowls! You just deserve a good

twenty-five, but it is ill flogging a fasting man, so turn in and fill your stomach, and then we'll see——'

'*You'll* see that no good comes of insulting and blackguarding an honest man! No, sir; you may chance to live to repent this here morning's work—you may, you may! You're the best man here, perhaps; but——' and he raised his hand, as was afterwards remembered, and shook it, 'but you and I, Mr. Lang, may chance to meet again in another place, when perhaps you may not be the master!'

The man was white with suppressed anger: his step tottered a little as he turned away, still muttering something to himself. Again he turned round and looked at Mr. Lang, and seemed about to speak; but after a moment's pause he put his hat on his head and went into the hut nearest to him. Mr. Lang suffered himself to be led in by his daughter, who longed, though she dared not, to say something to Charles Brand.

She heard the murmur of men's voices, the laughter and the rude jest, which, directly the master's back was turned, burst forth. Before they reached the breakfast parlour Mr. Lang's anger had vanished.

'The surly rascal! By Jove, he's a stout fellow, too! Has a quiet berth down there; all his own way, and can't bear a word to be said to him.'

'He is not a man to provoke so, papa! I wish you would be more careful. Indeed, it is dangerous to make enemies of these men. Bad policy, to say the very least. He looked so deeply angry—so hurt.'

'Did he, though? As if a man could hear of a valuable beast like Prince being lame, and not blaze up a bit! But stop his mouth—give him some prime 'baccy.' Here, money is scarce, but as Charlie was

an old friend of yours, I don't mind once in a way—here, give him this crown piece. That will smooth all over, I'll engage. Eh, pet, are you satisfied?' and he pinched her ear.

'Bless me, Issy, what makes you look so cold and pale?' exclaimed her mother, as they sat down to breakfast.

'Pale, is she? Confound the goose-chick! Hang that villain! Is it his black visage which has turned thee sick, child, eh?' said her father, turning to look well at her.

When the matter was explained a little, both Mrs. Lang and Kate were surprised at Isabel's 'sensitive nerves,' and joked her a good deal. But she said low, so that only Miss Terry, her neighbour, heard it,—

'That man's look was frightful! If I didn't know he was faithful and attached, I should be indeed uneasy. As it is—well—it is a pity!'

They went out very soon to seek the man, Mrs. Lang intending to make it up to him by a few condescending inquiries and a glass of wine, and Isabel really anxious for a chat with her old favourite; but they found he was gone—gone without any food!

He had brought out his horse, rubbed him down carefully, and let him drink; and then, without a word to any one, rode away—homewards, it was supposed.

'He didn't wait for orders?'

'No,' one man answered. 'He said any orders could be sent.'

Mr. Lang was of course extremely angry again. He had quite got over his passion, a good breakfast helping not a little towards it. That this fellow should brood over and resent it, proved him more than deserv-

ing of everything Mr. Lang had said of him. At first, he threatened to ride after him and bring him back for punishment ; his horse must be tired, and could be easily overtaken. This Isabel would have found hard work to prevent, but for the fact that Mr. Lang and his boys were very much wanted to ride in quite an opposite direction, to help in bringing in some cattle—rather a wild set, and therefore exciting.

CHAPTER XX.

MYSTIFICATION.

IN the course of the morning, when Isabel was in the school-room, just as the morning's lessons were winding up, and wondering at the gentle patience with which Miss Terry heard a page of French vocabulary mispronounced by Fanny, a high-spirited child, said to be like herself, and rather a dunce, the difficult French was quickly broken off by an exclamation, 'There are visitors! O! it is Mr. Farrant and somebody. Now we shall go. I am glad!'

Isabel looked out, and saw Mr. Herbert and Mr. Farrant. The latter had dismounted, and was about to inquire if the family were at home, while Mr. Herbert showed his uncertainty of being welcome by retaining his seat on horseback till there was an order for admittance. She turned to look at Miss Terry, and to say, 'Send away the children, and come with me;' and she could not help seeing the deep blush which covered face and neck as the teacher bent over the book, and strove to recal her pupil's wandering attention. Isabel smiled involuntarily as she said again, 'Do come!' and then she herself hastened out, with pleasure and fear rather strongly contending; for she knew it was her note which had

done the deed, and she did not know how her mother and father would receive him ; while satisfaction at bringing 'the two' together again, quickened by the sight of the blush, was almost so great as to make her forget to be awkward about Mr. Farrant. Were the truth told, his visit on this particular occasion could have been dispensed with, however.

'How lucky that you are come !' was her greeting as she stepped out by the verandah ; 'we were in the most deplorable state of dulness. A man is coming for the horses ; you need not go yourself, Mr. Herbert. Well, if you will—if you wont trust any one but yourself. Is it 'Pearl' ?

'Yes ; therefore worthy of all care, and she wont bear rough handling, you see ; and to say truth, I do always prefer looking after my own horse in this country. No offence, I hope ?' he said, patting the silky mane.

'No ; it is not worth while.' Then catching up a parasol which usually lay within reach, she turned to accompany him to the stables, while Mr. Farrant, less experienced in the careless ways prevalent, or perhaps caring less, gave up his steed to the boy who appeared, and after greeting Isabel, proceeded to pay his respects in the drawing-room.

'I have obeyed you, Isabel,' Mr. Herbert said as they went on.

'Yes ; so I perceive. You are very good,' she said, but rather doubtfully, for she was at the moment wondering—should her father return and find him, how would he behave ? So much, she well knew, depended on the circumstances of the hour.

'I hope it is all right,' Mr. Herbert went on. 'I hold you responsible. I fancied, after what passed, I

should not be justified in coming without express invitation from your father. But I have taken yours as the second best thing.'

'Papa will forget it all! I know he is sorry for it now; only being the elder, and so on, he couldn't quite make up his mind to be the first to come round. Papa's anger is hot, but soon over; he wonders that people mind it, he so completely forgets it himself.'

'Well, I am ready to overlook much, knowing his temper, and making excuses for him on many accounts; but there is a point beyond which no man can be expected to go, or justified in bearing.'

'Ah! if you mean to talk and to look like that, I shall wish I had never interfered,' Isabel said.

'Like what? How am I looking to displease you, eh, Isabel?'

'Never mind! Only, please we wont, talk about it;' and she drew a very long breath.

He looked at her, half amused and half kindly. 'Are you very doubtful as to the issue of your efforts? Do you wish me now to give it up? I can leave you here at once, if you like.'

'O no! the fact is, papa and the boys are away after cattle. I don't expect them yet. He will be pleased to hear of your visit, I know. There was a great fuss this morning about the colt, which is terribly lame—some snake-bite, or perhaps a centipede, they say; and Charlie Brand came here about it.'

'Yes, so I understand,' Mr. Herbert said, drily; 'indeed, I saw him—hem. He is a capital servant, Isabel, and has served you all well.'

'I know. So he went to you. O, he looked so dreadfully angry, and used such threats;' she shuddered a little.

‘ You are certainly nervous, my dear Isabel. There is nothing, I hope, to fear from him ; he is too good a man. But—’

‘ I know, I know !—don’t let us begin about that. Now, is ‘ Pearl ’ right ?’

‘ Yes ; but how is it I can’t hit on a subject pleasing to you this morning ?’ Something in her face made him draw her hand on his arm as they returned to the house. At first neither spoke ; then he said, ‘ I took Mr. Farrant to a new part of his straggling parish to-day. He is going about his work in a very orderly manner, and I really believe he will make his way here, and be appreciated.’

He consulted her face again with a quick glance, as if to see if this subject was more fortunate. But something was the matter with the parasol, and she was intent on rectifying it, so that her face was hidden. By the time it was put right they had reached the verandah. As he stepped back for her to precede him, she turned quickly round—

‘ Please not to tell papa or mamma, or Kate, that it was my doing.’

‘ You foolish little thing ; I know that you must really be frightened, to be so beseeching. Trust me ; for your sake I will take care that there shall be nothing unpleasant ; I mean, of course, as far as I can manage it.’

‘ For ‘ my sake ’ ?’ and she gave a saucy and incredulous smile.

‘ Yes ; for whose sake but yours ? For the sake,’ he added in another tone, ‘ of the little maiden who stood at this very window, and first judged me as a crusty fellow for not liking children ; then thought me *not so bad*, after all, and took my part. From that

time till now she has been my chief object in this house. Eh, Isabel ?

‘And soon she will have to cede that honour,’ she added, laughing, and turning to go in. He had no opportunity of asking what she meant, for she led him at once into the drawing-room, where all the party were.

Mr. Farrant had probably, Isabel thought, prepared the way, for Mrs. Lang’s reception of Mr. Herbert was kind enough. She regretted her husband’s absence, and inquired much for his sister. He remained talking to her for an unusual time, till, in fact, Mr. Farrant proposed going over their songs : then Mr. Herbert indulged himself in a newspaper and easy-chair, from which he might drink in the sweet sounds and also make a few quiet observations.

He had not heard them for some time, and he praised the improvement in Isabel’s part warmly, and said it was a good work bringing out her voice. Mr. Farrant was animated in his encouragement, proving that practice and teaching would do so much. He was sure, from the tone of Mr. Herbert’s own voice in speaking and reading, that he could sing if he tried.

This Mr. Herbert denied, saying he had tried very hard when a lad, emulous of being musical. Miss Terry urged him to make a trial now, and drilled him a little through the ‘Do, re.’ He succeeded better than he expected, and was pleased,—tried again, and again, and finally sang an easy song or two with Miss Terry, who offered to give him lessons, but at the same time urged his acquiring a little knowledge of the notes, &c. She went to the school-room for books, and he accompanied her, and when there, they remained deep in talk for some little time.

Isabel's delight was extreme. She could scarcely keep it to herself, and her gleeful eyes chanced suddenly to meet Mr. Farrant's. He was looking amused too, and even conscious. Leaving his seat near Mrs. Lang, he came close to her and was bending towards her, when she caught a look from Kate which brought all the blood to her face and gave a very sudden, if not unwelcome, turn to her thoughts. When, however, the sense of his words, spoken in a low tone, did reach her mind, she as speedily recovered her ease, her interest in what he said absorbing other feelings.

'Ellen Maclean has left the district, and is, I hear, gone far away,' he was saying.

'It is true, then! And do you know where she is gone?'

'Her father does not,' he answered, after a moment's pause. 'I am sorry to say the step was taken entirely without his knowledge, far less consent. I fear very much it will end ill.'

'How so? Where is it? and who managed it? I did not know she had a friend who could procure her a situation.'

'It was no true friend, I fear; though perhaps she thought so. Her peculiar mind forbids her being judged by common rules, or I should be seriously afraid that she had acted in this most improperly.'

'What do you mean? Do tell me, Mr. Farrant, please! Ellen is much to me—very much. I can't help feeling her as a sort of charge. Her own mother—such a sweet woman, every one says—was my foster-mother, and Nelly was born here.'

'Yes; so I heard. I cannot tell you where she is gone till I am more certain of facts than I am now. It is a bad business, and there has been much mystery

and concealment. This alone would arouse my suspicion.'

'But is any one looking after her? Is she actually gone?'

'Yes; her father is gone after her—at least, he is gone to find out what he can. It is since he left this morning that I discovered what I have as—as—to the party concerned.'

He stopped in grave thought. 'You have a man called Smith, or Bill, here, haven't you?' he asked, presently.

'Yes; 'Gentleman Bill.' A sneaking, smooth, but very clever man—a ticket-of-leave man.'

'Just so. I suspect he has been in the business, but I don't know. Wasn't there an idea of her marrying your storekeeper?'

'He wished it, and asked papa's leave; but Nelly wouldn't have him.'

'He is very angry now, and in his rage has let out a few hints of shameful conduct of his own and others. There has been some curious and deep play. I can't quite understand it. But I fear for the poor girl very much.'

So did Isabel, though her fears took no certain shape. Affairs were not by any means in a comfortable state among their numerous government men and women, she knew. Venn was strongly suspected to be at the bottom of much incipient rebellion, but Mr. Lang would not hear a word from any one against him. He had promoted the man with a full knowledge of his character, and in a fit of worry and fear had resolved to rid himself of the evil by making it the man's interest to serve his master.

Unfortunately, this step had been opposed, and Mr.

Lang having once made a personal party matter of it, was determined to 'carry his point over every one's head,' a motive which had become a very ruling one in his life. Isabel had left Mr. Farrant to continue the subject to her mother, and was ruminating on his information, while absently plucking the leaves from the creeper which trailed over the verandah. Voices reached her from the school-room window, which opened also on the verandah, at an angle from the drawing-room.

'I am so very glad,' Mr. Herbert was saying, 'to have this opportunity of speaking ; circumstances were against me before.'

What Miss Terry's answer was, did not transpire—something, doubtless, favourable and sweet, Isabel thought. Presently his voice again reached her, a little subdued, but by no means a whisper.

'Yes ; mystery is always undesirable, but in this case it is right—for a time. And if you write within three days, it will do, though the sooner the better. Can't you send a note by the post-boy ?'

A few words were lost—he was gone further from the window. Now he returns, and Isabel can so well understand the content, the composed, and controlled, but deep satisfaction of the tone ; she can even see, in her own fancy, the answering look in his face, so familiar are his habits and expressions to her.

'Be hopeful ! The worst, the difficult part, is over. Now that intercourse is renewed, opportunity will not be lacking. I can venture to answer for Mr. Lang ; with all his faults, he is truly kind-hearted, and I can see that you are a special favourite. He will be delighted to secure your society near.'—Again, 'Mr. Farrant is impatient, yet, pray, beg him to be guarded, cautious—to think it well over before'

Isabel's downright honesty here caused conscience to prick sharply. With a tell-tale face, she put her head round the corner. 'What are you two talking secrets at the open window for? I heard you—at least, I heard some—and I understand all about it!'

They came out—Miss Terry's cheeks quite as red as Isabel's, while the gentleman looked very provoking and rather triumphant. 'You understand, do you? Well, we know you can keep a secret, and your forbearance won't be taxed long either. As you have thrust yourself on our secret council, you must e'en take the consequence and act the discreet friend. As you have heard 'all about it,' your own excellent judgment will point out the necessity of silence as yet. What have you done with Farrant? Where is he, Issy?'

'Talking to mamma,' she answered, again stealing a look at Mr. Herbert's lighted-up face, and then noting Miss Terry's very evident embarrassment.

The two gentlemen were just speaking of taking leave when Mr. Lang's voice was heard, and very soon he and his boys came in sight, and also the bullocks.

Isabel looked quickly from the returning party to Mr. Herbert. Was the moment propitious? But the affair was taken out of her hands. She heard her mother begging both the gentlemen to remain and see Mr. Lang.

She felt Mr. Herbert's glance, as it rested for a moment on herself, and she looked up in time to see him exchange a look of meaning with Miss Terry. At the same instant, he expressed his intention of waiting to pay his respects to Mr. Lang; but Mr. Farrant, having spoken a few quiet words to Miss Terry, turned to her and said, he hoped she would kindly say every-

thing proper to Mr. Lang for him, but he must return home at once, he had important business to attend to.

Mr. Herbert watched the clergyman ride down the hill with a grave, yet amused air.

‘What should you say, Isabel—judging solely by the cut, the air, the *tout ensemble*, as the minister rides yonder—should you guess him a happy, a successful man, or not—eh?’ He looked at her with a mischievous twinkle in his eye.

‘Indeed, I don’t know—very doubtful, I should say,’ was her answer, with a little annoyance in it. ‘But,’ she went on, determined to return his joke on himself, ‘were I asked as much about some gentleman near me, I should not hesitate so much.’

‘Ah, indeed?’

‘No—in fact, a little less broad display of content would be more *interesting*,’ she said, with a stress on the word.

He raised his eyebrows with a smile of interrogation and surprise; then lowering both his look and his voice, he said quietly and with some earnestness, ‘I am content, Isabel,’ as you say. Here he paused and looked at her; then smiled at something in her face.

‘Mahomet found the mountain full of promise—but—come into the garden,’ he added, and trying to take her hand.

‘No,’ she said, withdrawing a step from him, and surprised at his manner, so suddenly in the last sentence telling of deeper feeling than he often showed; and while she liked it, shrinking from it too—wondering at herself why, now it came to the point, she did not more eagerly meet his advances towards making her a confidante.

‘No,’ I don’t like you so—so—triumphant—so

dreadfully happy ; I can imagine all you have to say ; and I don't care to hear any rhapsody second-hand. Besides, here comes papa full of the wild beasts—and that is a subject I do like.'

'Umph,' and he bit his lip. 'Rhapsody' indeed ! You're as slippery as—as You are the most eccentric of human beings ! But, Isabel, you are not in earnest. May I not trust to—to—the gleam of light, I'

'What gleam of light?—ah, I understand ! 'Metaphor,' I suppose, eh ? Very proper, I dare say ; but I am too plain to catch it all at once. A 'gleam of light ;' poetical perhaps ? Is that the way you gained your 'gleam of light'—by talking poetry instead of plain English?—ah, you are all alike—can't use common sense or plain prose. Old Mr. Jolly's is the only way—and I wonder how Tom would talk ?'

'Tom ! what on earth has Tom to do with it ? He seems to interest you very deeply ! But I own, I can't exactly see what possible connexion he has with any expression I may have been unfortunate enough to use—rousing your spirit of sarcasm thereby.'

'There now—off you go—phiz!—phiz—iz—pop ! Well, well ! I suppose it must be excused ! I implore your pardon for knocking over your romantic and poetical ideas. Only, don't you see—what can I do ? I am so downright and so matter-of-fact, that I can't understand fine words. You should go to Kate, she would lend a willing and a sympathising ear.'

'I won't trouble her, thank you ! But if you are in one of your wild, impossible moods, I can, in fact, I must, wait. I wonder if any one of the wild cattle they chased to-day was more difficult to get hold of and win—manage, I mean, than' 'Good morning,

sir,' said Mr. Lang, who coming up, heated and eager about his successful run, turned the attention of every one to himself at once. There was no allusion made by him or by Mr. Herbert to the past. A very slight increase of rapid utterance—a little stammer on Mr. Lang's part, and the slightest possible touch of hauteur in Mr. Herbert's bow—alone marked the consciousness which both sought to hide. Mr. Lang broke off in the midst of his description of the desperate leap a bullock had been about to take, but was prevented by Willie, of whom his father was greatly proud, to take it for granted Mr. Herbert would remain and dine with them. 'It was very lucky, for he had picked up another guest—some one Mrs. Lang wouldn't guess in a hurry, or Kate either; indeed, she was quite on a wrong scent, he saw from the becoming colour rising in her cheeks.' A very fine gentleman, indeed; a scholar, very polite, very handsome, and so on, but yet not a man to bring up a lady's blushes. Wait and see—you'll see!' Mr. Lang cried out, as he went away, laughing and enjoying the mystification of his wife. 'Only I say, Mrs. Lang, we must have something good for dinner. Isn't there time now for some of those very nice custards Miss Terry makes so well?'

'Nonsense, Mr. Lang; I wish you would forget that stupid joke? But who is it? Girls! can you guess who is coming in this mysterious fashion? Where can your papa have met any one out in the Bush?'

'Papa is so fond of jokes!' said Kate. 'It is one of our neighbours, of course. Mr. Jolly or his son, I dare say.'

'I fear nothing so refreshing,' said Isabel; 'I rather suppose it must be the Roman Catholic priest; I met

him this morning among our men's huts. And I don't know what it is, but there is something in that man that I can't get over. They say he is here trying to get names for a church.'

'Yes, he was in the settlement yesterday,' Mr. Herbert remarked.

'To be sure Mr. Lang must be crazy to invite him here to dinner! It can't be! Really it is very wrong, very dangerous!' exclaimed Mrs. Lang as she went out to give orders, much annoyed evidently.

'It is Dr. Mornay, the person the Keelys were fond of. We met him at the North Shore, don't you remember, Kate?' said Isabel.

'O, yes! The Keelys swear by him. For my part, I thought him very disagreeable.'

'Did you? I can't say that!' returned her sister. 'But I am afraid of him.'

'You afraid of any one, Issy? Well, I must make a note of that!' said Mr. Herbert, smiling at her. 'Come into the garden,' he continued, in a lower key. 'There is time enough—I have something to say to you.'

'Yes, of course!' But I don't want to hear it; I know all about it.'

'You do?' and he tried to catch her eye.

'Yes. There is Miss Terry going out with the children. Well?' she added, seeing him turn back to herself, indifferently. 'Now go! I have really some work which must be done before dinner! Now, don't pretend to be bashful! Go, and have a talk. It will do you good;' and she moved on.

'You are a very provoking girl! You might borrow a leaf from that lady's book. Isabel, don't go. Consider how long it is since I was here! But

she only laughed from the window, and pointed mockingly to the path where Miss Terry might be seen with the two little girls and their favourite dog. Then she ran off to her own room, and Mr. Herbert, finding Kate had also disappeared, after a few low growls, actually did as he was bidden, and overtook the governess.

‘She is really very trying,’ he could not help saying.

‘Who——Isabel? Has she been teasing you again?’ asked Miss Terry.

‘I wonder what she will be after all!’ he said, musingly.

‘Something very good. There is an excellent foundation, sterling good.’

He sighed, and then tried to turn the subject to Kate, but Miss Terry continued. ‘Isabel has never yet known sorrow or trial. I believe that is wanting to perfect her. It is a theory of mine,’ she went on, earnestly, ‘that without this, scarcely any character is complete, especially strongly marked ones such as Isabel’s.’

‘I wonder where trouble or trial is to come from? I should be sorry to see her gaiety—her look of perfect health—touched. No! I can’t fancy her in sorrow!’ Mr. Herbert answered.

‘From what I gather, I fancy trial of a certain kind cannot be very far off. Poor Mr. Lang is often troubled and anxious about money matters, and these young people have never yet known what poverty is.’

Ah, true! His affairs are darkish, I believe. Well! Isabel has a brave, strong heart.’

‘Indeed she has! You will see how she will come

out then. They will all depend on her.' Miss Terry spoke with animation, and Mr. Herbert was well pleased to continue the subject.

They turned into the vine-walk. Isabel saw them from her window. She observed the bent heads and their gestures, and she smiled. By degrees, however, her face clouded and her work fell neglected.

She thought how long Mr. Herbert had been her own especial friend, her own property as it were, would he, as a married man, be the same to her? Then she reckoned up his good points, and thought Miss Terry a very fortunate woman, and fell to wondering what they talked of, and if Miss Terry ever saw that particular look in his eye, which only came very seldom indeed, but so lighted up and changed his whole face, and which had lately, even that very morning, made her drop her own eye and caused an emotion which she could not account for, and found hard to hide entirely.

She had now and then seen a look a little like it in her father—never in Mr. Farrant. This made her compare the two men, and she found herself wishing that Mr. Farrant was in some points more like her old friend. She ended by deciding that all such affairs as love-making and marriage, were very disagreeable, and she heartily wished people would remain as they were. Why not? They were all very comfortable.

CHAPTER XXI.

MR. LANG'S GUEST.

WHILE Isabel was still deep in thought, the dinner-bell roused her, and her dress was still unready. She half regretted giving up her walk with Mr. Herbert for the sake of finishing it, and decided that if he made another attempt towards opening his heart to her, she would be a good and patient listener. For she should not like to lose him altogether; and if she showed no sympathy now, perhaps it might come to that. So she trained herself into a grand plan of sedate and proper behaviour, and really entered the drawing-room with a face so grave as to make Mr. Herbert look several times at her in surprise, while Mr. Lang grew fidgety and missed something, he did not know exactly what.

Presently he left the room. 'I do hope that Mr. Farrant will not hear of this,' remarked Mrs. Lang, who by her increased perpetual restlessness had been betraying her uneasiness.

'Do you mean about inviting the priest, mamma?' said Isabel.

'Yes, my dear, I cannot but think it is very ill-judged. I can't imagine what Mr. Lang is thinking of!'

'He is turning Liberal after all,' suggested Mr Herbert, evidently amused.

'Now,' said Isabel, firing up, 'no inuendo if you please, Mr. Herbert! I don't like that smile at all—I know your ways. That smile is'

'No harm, I hope?' he said.

'If my papa meets a man tired and hungry, and kindly, out of genuine hospitality and good nature, bids the weary man turn in and eat and drink and refresh himself, is that a reason for all the unutterable things which are stirring in your heart, mamma! Mrs. Lang! Do you grudge a meal to a good and devoted man, who has been doing his duty, under a burning sun and among your own people?'

'Hear her! She will turn poet yet,' cried out Jem, laughing.

'O, what a fuss, Isabel!' sighed Kate.

'You seem warm in his cause,' Miss Terry said.

'She doesn't mean it!' put in Mrs. Lang, in high perplexity. 'But Issy is too fond of fun; indeed, my dear, you are. I always say practical jokes are very reprehensible. Isabel is only joking, Mr. Herbert.'

'Indeed, no! Mamma, I assure you I am in sober earnest when I repeat that I commend papa for this attention to an excellent man. Besides, it is so pleasant to see a new face, and not by any means a common one either. Father Mornay is worth seeing.'

She had raised her voice partly in fun, and partly from a little natural love of opposition, when behold! the door, partly open before, was pushed quite back, and Patrick announced, 'His Reverence, Father Mornay,' and amid the very evident confusion and embarrassment of Mrs. Lang and her daughters, the person in question stood before them, bowing as coolly

and as gravely as if he had not heard Isabel's speech. She was fain to hide herself, thoroughly ashamed, bending under the friendly shelter of a large folio, to allow her cheeks to cool. But in the midst of the rush in her ears, and the tingle in her nerves, she very soon was led out of herself, and charmed into forgetfulness of her flippancy, as the polished gentlemanly tones of the two gentlemen's voices reached her. Mr. Herbert, unlike his conduct on some occasions, had gallantly come to the rescue. He covered the flutter and confusion, too visible among the ladies, by his own ease, and very soon they were in full flow of eager talk, which completely interested Isabel. Presently she ventured even to raise her eyes, and then turned them towards the speakers, in her own mind comparing them as their opposite characteristics struck her. Each was a good specimen of a man. Perhaps Mr. Herbert had never showed himself to better advantage in her eyes. They were speaking of the Holy Land, where both had travelled. Mr. Herbert was animated and eager on his favourite topic, and unconsciously he suddenly turned his eyes to Isabel. There was much in the look, hasty as it was ; she felt it to be full of sympathy and interest, even tender. Perhaps it was for her sake, to spare her pain, that he had thus come forward and broken through his habitual reserve ; she could not help watching to see if such another glance was haply bestowed elsewhere. If so, she could not detect any. Miss Terry was evidently listening too, and had suffered her favourite knitting to lie idle. She looked the picture of serene content, but Isabel wanted something more. She thought there ought to be more stir, more play in the countenance, for surely *she* must be feeling very proud and gratified ! With

a slight sensation of disappointment, and being provoked, she again turned her eyes on the gentlemen. This time it was the priest she looked at. Immediately his eyes moved and met hers. His next sentence was doubly animated ; he went on to describe a sunset he had seen when on the banks of the Jordan. There was both humour and taste in the graphic account of their encampment. His choice of words was singularly good, his voice musical and measured. She was wondering how he preached, and what manner of man he really was ; for the word 'Priest' conveyed no meaning but the popular and generally received notion characteristic of his profession. The individual character hidden beneath his garb, was what she wanted to know. Again she raised her eyes to his face, pursuing her own train of thought, and for the moment oblivious of sun setting, or Jordan's beauties ; but this time her own quickly drooped, and she was vexed with herself for a blush which would rise, on finding him looking at her—looking into her, she felt ; and with an expression she could not understand. From that moment an odd fancy beset her, which set reason at defiance, and made her very uncomfortable. There was something strange in Dr. Mornay's look, something she had seen before somewhere, and was associated with some memory or thought she could not realise. She dared not boldly scrutinise his features, for each time she ventured to look at him, she found his eye was always on her. It might be nothing—he might have a trick of absently fixing his eye, or he might be trying to understand her ; struck by that speech he had so inopportunately overheard. Yet it was disagreeable, and she lost her self-composure and all pleasure in listening.

‘I think you must have observed it,’ Dr. Mornay was saying presently to Isabel herself. She looked up quickly and inquiringly.

‘Did you not see the very peculiar light and appearance in the sky yesterday evening?’ he went on. ‘I fancied I saw you looking at it. I was at the time near your men’s huts; I saw you come in from a gate.’

‘Yes, to be sure! Certainly she had observed the sky, but she had quite forgotten it,’ she said, with hesitation, and not able to hide her surprise, for she had not seen him at that time.

‘You did not see me?’ he went on, lowering his voice, and as if answering her expressive countenance. ‘No, I did not think you did—therefore—I—will you forgive me if I presume?—but something in you brought back my life long ago—so long ago—so divided from the present that it is like a dream, and I question if I really am the same creature that I then knew as myself. This has not displeased you, I hope—I trust?’ he went on with a grave, still earnestness, more forcible than vehemence or the flush of ardour, perhaps. It seemed so uncalled for that it half frightened her.

She was about to return one of her own merry, half-saucy answers, and lifted her face to his for the purpose, but her words were checked. Again that look—What was it? What did it mean? It was gone, almost as it came. Nothing remained but a look of suffering—a contraction of the brow which almost spoke of some physical pain. Perhaps it was that, and only that. This idea relieved her and gave a turn to her answer.

‘Why should it displease me? it did me no harm,’ she said.

‘Harm!’ he repeated, but in so faint a whisper she

was not sure he had said it at all, and at that moment Mr. Lang hurried in, full of hospitable welcome and excuse for some unforeseen delay; hoped his guest had introduced himself—made himself quite at home. 'That was Langville fashion! Every one do as he liked.' And in the plenitude of his good humour, soothed by practical assurance that his wine for once in a way had been well cooled, he appealed to Mr. Herbert if the fullest liberty was not granted in this house for every one to follow his own taste and inclinations?

'My door, sir, is always open, always stands wide open, to signify welcome to all friends! I hate your knockers and ring-bells, your forms and your ceremonies! Want a dinner? Want a bed? Come in, and in God's name be welcome to the best I have. Can't have a spread every day, you see! 'Tisn't every day I can produce certain custards, which, by the way,—my dear Mrs. Lang, this gentleman will honour us to-morrow, and let me beg there may be some of that incomparable—O, I beg pardon! To be sure! It is that lady to whom I must make my request. Dr. Mornay, sir, I know not if you have been duly presented, but allow me to name to you one—one of my most particular friends. Miss Terry!—Dr. Mornay! Ah, sir! you must positively taste Miss Terry's custards! Eh, Issy!'

This rambling speech, which at all events was exquisitely entertaining to himself, was ended even while Patrick announced that dinner was served.

With a quick gesture and pleasant smile Mr. Lang turned again to Miss Terry and offered his arm, hurrying her away, while he laughingly declared she was one of the 'wee folk' of whom his old nurse used to speak;

good beings, invisible except to their friends, always at hand when wanted, &c.

‘Hallo ! I say, where are they all ? Mr. Lang exclaimed, as on reaching the dining-room he found he had in his rapid way outstripped the others. ‘What is all this ? Mrs. Lang ! Mamma ! Missis ! Girls—what’s wrong ?’

‘You were in such a hurry, Mr. Lang !’ his wife murmured reproachfully, as with a flushed face she sailed in, holding up her ‘o’er long’ satin drapery with one hand, while the other, duly clothed in (forbid it fashion !) a mitten—lay ill at ease on Dr. Mornay’s arm.

Following close behind was Mr. Herbert, returning Isabel’s saucy smile, as he forcibly detained her hand, and would not allow her to fall back to be last, while at the same time he gaily deprecated some remarks of Kate’s, as she, somewhat unwillingly too, as it seemed, hung on the other side.

‘These young people wished to cut me in two, sir,’ he said, in answer to Mr. Lang’s questioning glance.

‘Cut you altogether, rather,’ Isabel returned ; ‘you men suppose we must be unhappy at having to walk from one room to another alone. Kate and I could have done quite well without you.’

‘You will forgive me, I hope,’ Mr. Herbert said to Kate, who still looked rather annoyed.

‘O, I am sure I don’t wish to interfere with any of Issy’s vested rights and privileges,’ she answered.

‘And do you reckon my support, my arm, as one ?’ he replied, with so pleasant a smile, she could no longer keep up her offence.

‘She does, I believe ! You know you have taught her to expect it, and . . .’

‘Expect it as a right, Kate, but not as in any way

necessary to my comfort,' Isabel here put in. 'I never so keenly regretted the melancholy fact of being 'grown up' before.'

'Indeed! How so?'

'Because I should like to exercise a privilege once mine, of punishing you. You are just too bad! What can he think of it?' Isabel said to Mr. Herbert, lowering her voice.

'The truth, if he likes. As if I was going to give you up to him! to, to—Isabel, I don't like the man's look.'

'That is your bad taste, for I think him the handsomest man I ever saw. But, hush!'

And as the clatter of removing covers, and Mr. Lang's praise of his mutton, hushed for a moment, it was, indeed, hardly safe to carry on such remarks.

'And what do you think of him, dear?' asked Isabel of Miss Terry, as winding her arm round her waist, she drew her out on the verandah after dinner.

'Of Dr. Mornay? He is determined, strong-willed, I should think.'

'Yes. Is he one to fear or to love the most?'

'Fancy loving that man!' exclaimed Kate.

'Not easily, I imagine,' Miss Terry said.

'I can fancy it, though!' Isabel remarked, after a short pause. 'At least, if he chose it. I wonder, was he ever loved? I suppose he had a mother, and sisters, too, perhaps. I should like to know his history,' she continued, musingly. 'There is a look which puzzles me. Not a very legible book, I fancy.'

'Probably not,' Miss Terry returned; 'at all events it is not a quality one is led to expect; such careful, jealous self-control, even of feature is exacted, that

the real nature may easily be hidden. He looks ill, I think.'

'Yes, and sad. Worn and saddened. I wonder if he is happy! I should like to know all about him!'

'Issy, you will be falling in love directly,' said Kate.

'My dears! my dears! What are you saying?' said Mrs. Lang. 'Take care! He is a priest, and you shouldn't say such a thing. Pray be careful, for they say they are so sharp, and hear and know everything.'

'But it is quite correct, isn't it, Miss Terry, to fall in love with some dark, mysterious creature,' said Isabel, in a pompous tone.

'This one is too old,' interrupted Kate. 'I think,' she went on, 'that he took a fancy to Issy. I really do! and this is why I think so. I saw him turn and look at her once or twice when she spoke, just as if he was trying to see if her face agreed with her words, and once he smiled at some thought of his own.'

'No doubt he was pleased, and he kindly wished to encourage Isabel, my love,' said Mrs. Lang. 'Of course he was struck with your beauty in the first instance, and then, being a priest, and therefore thinking of such things, he was unwilling to make Issy jealous or uneasy; so he smiled in a fatherly, encouraging way at her!'

'O, you will destroy me!' Isabel exclaimed, as soon as she could check her laughter. 'My dear, dear mammy's far-fetched solicitude, first for my amiability, her fear of jealousy, and dread of vanity! 'Tis too much! And, O! if only he and Mr. Herbert could know, or guess, what utter nonsense we four females have been guilty of—conceive what they would say, and how look! But let us go to the garden

and gather a rose. Come, Kate!' and as Miss Terry said she must go in to settle to-morrow's lessons, the sisters ran off, leaving Mrs. Lang to settle herself comfortably among her cushions. As she reclined her head she faintly murmured, 'Poor Issy's spirits do run away with her at times.'

'They will never take her far wrong,' Miss Terry turned round to answer, before leaving the room.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE PRIEST AND HIS PEOPLE.

IT was long after working hours, and the men on Mr. Lang's farm seemed to be in their huts, though one or two might be seen chopping wood into logs fit for their fires. Each man cooked his own meat, and baked his own damper. The long evenings were generally so spent. But now it appeared that something beyond the common routine of cooking, mending, and smoking, was going forward. One or two men sauntered towards a certain hut, looking curiously at it meanwhile. From within was heard a buzz of voices ; and looking through the tolerably wide chink left in the bark shutter of the unglazed window, one might see a group of eager faces standing in every kind of attitude, each eye, however, bent in one direction. A fire blazed cheerily, and the tin 'pannikins' were set, filled with tea beside it. In the shadow, withdrawn as far into a corner as possible, with the rude table before him, sat a man writing, and alternately making some remark, or asking a question. He had on a wide and long dark cape, which quite hid his figure, and wore a cap drawn far over his brow. The voice was peculiar. It was low and flexible, and although he spoke in a monotonous tone for the most part, there was every now and then, as if despite habitual control,

a ring, a thrill in it, which spoke of some inner vibration.

‘What may Barney say?’ he uttered, without looking up, or ceasing to write.

‘Plase yer riverence, Barney here is afther saying that when he got the blow which, saving your presence, knocked him clane dead on these shores to live a convict ever after, he says, the cratur do—there was a whisper, and a promise—’

‘An oath, Mick. By all the saints I swear ’twas an oath, a Bible oath; and ’twas myself heard it too,’ put in Barney.

‘Well, an oath,’ continued the first speaker, ‘that his prospecks should be attended to, your honour. And so——’

‘Proceed! How does that affect his still contributing his mite to his country’s deliverer and best friend?’

‘Why this way, your reverence . . .’

‘Good luck to ye!’ said Barney, pushing himself forward to tell his own story, now that the ice was broken by his friend. ‘The gentlemen in my own blessed country, yer riverence, said they would make it up to me, seeing the life was knocked clane out of me, owing to me fighting that day for O’Connell, (the blessing of the Virgin on him!) and niver a brass farthing has come into my pockets, your honour, at all at all. So if my pence isn’t to the fore, I hope you’ll not be hard on me for that same, but just make a ’randum of it, and give the gintlemen at home a hint of the promise, that is the oath, I’m maning.’

‘They will be both more willing, and more able to fulfil that promise, or oath, Barney, if they receive the proper rent from hence—you have wages?’

‘Your riverence, no ! I gets nothing, saving my bit and sup, forbye the wee duds o’ clothes just, and it may be a shilling now and then ; but the devil a penny I ever gets of wages.’

‘Well—not even one penny ? So Barney’s name is to appear with not even one penny after it, when this roll of names—’ and he held up the formidable roll of parchment for all to see. ‘When, I say, all these names shall be read aloud, in the presence of hundreds—ay, thousands of your countrymen—will your name be the only one with a blank, when every boy in the Green Isle would sooner go without his meal, than not contribute to send his champion to fight for his rights, for his liberty, and his church !’

There was a hum and a shuffling of feet at this appeal. Barney’s eyes rolled about uneasily, and he fumbled in his pockets.

Other names were called, and a chink of coppers followed. Barney remained irresolute.

‘Well?’ said the priest, looking at him again. ‘Well, Barney, you would let Dan O’Connell be beaten, would you ? You who once proved yourself so brave a champion, and so brave a boy. Ah ! Barney, you’ve given up your country, have you ? You’re not an Irish boy, I see. Perhaps you are a Protestant, eh ?—an Orangeman ?’

A burst of laughter greeted this, and many a joke went the round, while poor Barney shifted from one foot to the other, his face gathering a deeper hue, and the words finding increasing difficulty in coming out.

‘The saints ! But ye’re wrong there, your riverence. ’Tis a true Irish boy I am ; and by my sowl and St. Patrick, here’s just the last of the wee savings I was

*

making jist to send a trifle to show the folks at home I was aboveground. But here's for O'Connell, the frind of the poor, and Repale—Hurrah !'

'The Repale for ever !' and 'O'Connell for ever,' now resounded, while hats whirled madly overhead.

'Hush, boys ! hush ! It does me good to hear you ; but we must be prudent—we are in danger of being heard here. Mr. Lang is a Protestant, and it will only upset my work if there is any row. Now, I expect every man present here to-night to return each to his own hut, as if nothing had occurred. Do you hear me, Barney ?'

'Ay, your honour—your riverence I'm maning ! A quieter boy doesn't live than myself. I'm as meek as a lamb, as all know, except when my blood's up jist. The saints above know that except that fight at the fair, and the row at the election, and the bit of row the boys were after when——'

'Well, well ; we have not time to go through the list of your combats, friend Barney. Now here's a glass of the old stuff, and drink each man silently to the health of those he likes, adding also that of 'Ireland's friend.' No noise, I beg—I desire.'

'Now, good-night, good-night,' he said, as, after each had drained his glass with great gusto, they bowed low, and went out of the hut.

'Andrew Connor, remain ; I have a word to say to you.' And accordingly a worn, unhappy-looking man, gave a furious tug to his forelock, and came back, closing the door, in obedience to a sign from the priest.

'Come in and take a seat. Another glass will do you no harm ;' and he poured out some more of the Irish whisky which he had provided to reward the

punctual payers of O'Connell's rent, which was for some time collected among Irish emigrants, and even prisoners, and sent home.

'Andrew—can you tell me anything about a girl called Nelly or Ellen Maclean? The father was a good Catholic, and also the first wife; the present I can make nothing of; and now, on inquiring for this girl, about whom I was much interested at my last visit, I hear very strange rumours. Can you help me to the rights of the case?'

'I don't consarn myself much with the talk of the place, your reverence. But I did hear she wont resave Venn's—that's our storekeeper's—advances at all. She jist held her head high for him, the cratur. 'Tis said she likes one Lynch.'

'Where is she now?'

'And that's more than I can say, your honour. 'Twas said she was living with one Allen; but I heard afterward she'd heard of a good situation somewhere far from this, and that her father and Lynch are mad jist; but I can't say.'

'Is there a man here called William Smith, or Gentleman Bill?'

'Yes, your reverence, there is. That is, he was here till yesterday morning, and then he got his wages paid up, seeing he is 'ticket-of-leave' man, and they do say the master added a few oaths over and above, for the ready cash is scarce now. He didn't say where he was after going—the boy.'

'Was it supposed he had anything to do with the girl—ever liked her?'

'Not that I know, your honour. Gentleman Bill kept his own counsel, anyway. But I did hear he had been employed by Venn to use his soft tongue—

and he keeps the article well oiled—to persuade the girl ; and he was chums with Allen’s folks.’

‘ Well, Andrew, if I can prevent it, that girl shall never marry Venn or Lynch. She is a daughter of the Church, and should not seek to mate with a heretic. If you can either give me certain information as to where she is now, or can bring her to my house, I will give you this’—showing a sovereign.

‘ And where may your reverence’s house be, your honour, if not down in Sydney ?’

‘ For the present I have taken that small place in the valley, known by name of Swampoak Gully. There my servant will always be, if I should be absent. He can receive you, the message, or the girl. It is there, in course of time, under God’s blessing, we hope to plant a church, and a resident priest will then be sent to this district. We have nearly enough names as it is, to entitle us to Government help. Meanwhile I shall be backwards and forwards to keep the flock together.’

As Andrew went away, a servant brought a horse to the hut door, on which Father Mornay vaulted with practised agility. The horse was remarkable for its beauty and good grooming. Very soon he was riding fast down the rough road, displaying a seat which a Leicestershire huntsman might have envied, and followed by his servant, a man of colour, on another carefully-selected animal.

The next morning Father Mornay was again at Langville to pay his respects, as he politely said, after enjoying Mr. Lang’s hospitality ; and, as it seemed, from the turn his conversation soon took, he wished to introduce the subject of Ellen Maclean’s sudden disappearance, now become the general talk on the farm. Dr. Mornay won Isabel’s hearty good-will and

gratitude by the warm interest he took in the poor girl, and his earnest assertions that he would leave no stone unturned to find her, at least, to know where and with whom she went.

They were in the garden, when, breaking short in the midst of an interesting conversation, Dr. Mornay said—

‘It is strange how little I consider you as—almost—a stranger! I could—do you think the notion very fanciful?—that of having seen, heard, or known a person some time before, though when and how is impossible to discover?—I could believe as, pardon me, I do wish, you were one of my own flock, and my friend——’

‘It is odd,’ she answered, in her ready and bright way. ‘It is odd, too, that I constantly am forgetting that you are a—a Roman Catholic priest, and as such, I suppose, looking upon us all as just so many heretics’—albeit, perhaps, softened with a sort of contemptuous pity.’

‘Would you like to hear how—in what way—I think of you?’ There was a short pause, and the priest had turned and fixed his keen but mournful eyes on her. ‘Ah! I could indeed wish—wish. . . .’ He stopped suddenly, and turned even pale, she thought, while something like a spasm seemed to cross his features. He took a few hasty steps onwards, and then spoke again in his usual modulated, quiet tone, ‘Forgive me!’

‘Were you suffering?’ she asked, with wonder and sympathy, though she hardly knew why she felt it, for she had not really liked him till to-day.

‘Yes—suffering! But, no matter, we must all suffer at one time or other—all—even you, Miss Isabel Lang.

You who, it is plain, have never been near enough to sorrow, even to scan her features, or to recognise her, but in a very vague way. Will you judge me cruel in saying that your hour will come?’

He spoke earnestly, and Isabel was touched, though she did her best to subdue the feeling.

‘And how do you know I have never seen sorrow?’ she asked.

‘Because I am accustomed to read and to learn faces and features; and I know well that your first phase of youth is not yet ended. Life has passed unconsciously with you as yet. You are free from self-study. You live—exist. You *are*, as it were—you know not how or why. Happy time—soon, soon to vanish—with some never to be at all! A time will come when all common things around you will take another aspect; you will be troubled, perhaps perplexed, as is natural to one of your frank and straightforward temperament, but——’

‘Trouble, trouble! Every one prophesies trouble and sorrow! I wonder why? I have been happy, certainly; but,—I can fancy being even still happier.’

‘Exactly, with the trouble will come the joy—a new joy.’

‘But when and how?’

‘That is what I cannot answer—dare not try to answer. It is strange, it is passing strange. I am much, much older than you; I have had some experience of life. Yet now, for the first time, I could wish some steps of that life retraced. Were we living in an earlier age,—were I credulous as some few I have known, I might fancy myself under some spell, so completely do I find my apprecia-

tion of certain things changed—my cherished habits of thought and aspiration altered. You think I pity you in scorn? No, no; not I! True, I believe, and am bound to believe the holy church the safe fold, the most completely organised and energetic of all church governments: I suppose you think I ought to be seeking converts? Know, young lady— young friend, for so I may surely call you, that I am not one of these. Far from pitying you, I——’ He had turned; they were now standing at the end of the trellised vine-walk, and he took her hand and gazed a moment at her, as if searching to the very depths of her surprised and wondering eyes.

‘Would that you could pity me! But I must go; I leave the district to-morrow. We may not meet again; yet—will you—will you try not to look on me with dislike, or fear, or distrust? World-tossed, weary traveller as you see me, stiffened in iron armour, which yet is not I, and never will be! even I have once had my fresh springtime of youth. I had a home—mother—sister! The sight of you has moved waters which I deemed dried up. Well!—’

As he paused, his look gradually became more touched with sadness—sadness, blended still with something she did not understand, but which made her feel shy, never having seen so much deep fervour of heart appear in a cold and composed exterior. She said, ‘I don’t dislike, or distrust you.’

‘Thank you!—thanks!’ he presently said, taking her hand. ‘Now, farewell!—I shall make it my business to search for Ellen Maclean. Good morning.’

The last words were quite in his ordinary manner, and with a bow which would have done credit to any

courtly circle, this new and, to Isabel, perplexing acquaintance left her.

It was some time before she saw him again ; and though his manner, look, and words, left a strong impression at the time, other circumstances soon put it out of sight, for Isabel was one to throw herself heartily into the spirit of the hour, whatever that might be, and not to dwell on her own thoughts and memories.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE WOLF AT THE DOOR.

‘WELL, Issy, and how goes on the matchmaking, eh?’ asked Mr. Lang, giving his daughter a loving pinch on her ear as he spoke.

‘Which?’ Isabel asked.

‘What, which?—how many are there, then? and pray are you in the fashion too, Issy? Mean’st thou to desert the old nest, young bird?’

She did not answer, but a blush mounted even to her brow.

He went on—‘Is it prospering? Ought we to ask the Grand Signor to dinner? because you see, if it is right, and any good to the little woman, Issy, let it be done. Since he has thought fit to pocket his pride and come here, so making me an apology, in point of fact, d’ye see?—I have no objection to doing what I can to help on this little affair; but between ourselves, Issy, it must be quick; for how long we shall call this our own is more than I know.’

‘Mr. Herbert has only been here once, you know, daddy; I thought then he made good use of his time, and I don’t doubt he will very soon be here again. It is great fun.’

‘Ah, well!—don’t get fond of that occupation, girl. Leave folks to manage their own affairs; it is not safe

to meddle with matrimony. Does Kate's admirer continue to play the devoted? I fancy I have heard less of his being here.'

'He is absent; looking out about his own home, they say.'

'Ah, indeed! Making his house ready?—Is that it, Issy?'

'I don't know, sir; Kate thinks or hopes so. I have my doubts, rather. I don't like a hard twinkle in Mrs. Vesey's eye.'

'Your mother would fret, wouldn't she, Issy?'

'She would feel hurt, I am sure; she likes Mr. Fitz.'

'Ah, then, mind if he comes in my way I shall assuredly break his head; that is, if he serves my child in a shabby fashion. But here they come. Mamma has been brewing the coffee; and here is bonnie Kate, as fine as a scraped carrot. By Jove, Kate, that's a very pretty dress!'

The letter-bag was brought in with coffee and the more substantial parts of the meal; and Mr. Lang, after passing on a letter or two to his wife and daughters, proceeded to read one of his own.

Long was the silence. The 'broil' was growing cold; Isabel took on herself to help it, and putting some on her father's plate, she said—'Now, papa.' But this and many other attempts to recal him to the fact that breakfast was waiting for him, failed to rouse Mr. Lang from his intent perusal of this absorbing letter.

Mrs. Lang grew nervous and troubled; glanced at her husband, and at the fast spoiling viands which she had taken pains to cook herself for his pleasure and benefit.

‘News of the wool, Mr. Lang?’ she asked. ‘Have the last drays from the station reached Sydney? What ship is it to go by? No more failures, I hope!’

Still not a word; but as Isabel thought a very ominous neglect of his coffee and egg.

‘Hang the rascals!’ he exclaimed presently in a loud voice, and with a sudden jerk of his legs which considerably splashed the table-cloth, and made them all start.

‘Am I made of money? Can I force people to buy? Can I coin money? A pretty kind of an offer! Pack up, girls! pack up!—we must leave this.’

‘Pray, Mr. Lang!—I beseech you not to be so abrupt, if you have any mercy on my nerves!’ murmured poor Mrs. Lang, plaintively.

‘Nerves!—fiddlesticks! That’s a nice fellow!’ drawing his mouth on one side, and then giving a long whistle. ‘Pon my word and say so, Kate.’

‘Do eat your egg, papa!’ said Isabel.

‘Eat? I can’t afford to eat! Hang that vile Jew! Eat indeed!—’

The letter was then read again, examined, turned upside down, grinned at, twisted, then folded carefully and deposited in his waistcoat pocket, the cold coffee hastily swallowed, a piece of dry toast caught up, and Mr. Lang marched off.

Mrs. Lang burst out crying, and Isabel looked grave as she said, ‘I am sure it is bad news!’

‘O dear! I wish it would come at once, if it is to come!’ said Kate. ‘One so often hears the cry of Wolf, that one really ceases to believe in it.’

‘It is something serious, I am sure,’ again said Isabel, as she played with her teaspoon.

Soon Mrs. Lang dried her eyes before proceeding to

her store, and Kate shook her flounced apron, and very philosophically resolved not to believe there was such a thing as ruin or poverty. All gentlemen talked so! So she went to the drawing-room and placed the furniture as much as she could in Vine Lodge fashion, and hummed the air of a certain comic song, and then she went to finish her new dress in the work-room, meditating a ride with the boys to the Settlement, as she wished to try if she could get a few hooks-and-eyes at the store there.

Isabel sat on in the dining-room, doing nothing till she heard her father's step in the hall, as he left his room. He went out at the front door, and she followed with her parasol. After walking a little way, he turned almost as if he expected to see her behind him, and waited till she came up.

'How very dry the ground is again,' she said.

'Very; but there's plenty of grass, that's one good thing.'

After a pause, she said, 'Do you think that the boiling down will really pay?'

'Pay? nothing will pay. The country is ruined—ruined!' Presently he added, 'Confound me if I know what to do! I'm at a dead halt, Issy. If I could only raise this paltry sum I could perhaps manage to swim on till things came round.'

'Can't you borrow it?'

'Of whom?'

'Of any friend.'

'Pooh! you talk nonsense, girl. I've had enough of borrowing of 'friends,' as you call it. That's why my friend of the mustaches rides the high horse over me, because I borrowed that unlucky 500*l.* of him—no, I can't stand that.'

‘Whom do you mean, sir?’

‘Herbert, to be sure. Didn’t you know I was debtor to him for 500l.? ha, ha! Let him come down on me if he likes; but I will pay him off as soon as ever I can sell stock to cover principal and interest. But I believe he likes the honour of lending me cash rather than not; hey, Issy?’

‘I should think he would be very glad of it himself, sir. But you don’t mean that he duns you?’

‘O, no! he never mentioned it; but I see it in his face pretty often. But, there—go in, girl, go in; the men are waiting for me. Keep up mamma’s spirits, and don’t all of ye go into the die-aways, or I shall take to the Bush, I believe. Keep the ball up, Issy!’

She smiled, as she saw him smile; and yet her heart beat as she marked the dimness in his eye and felt the fond pressure of his heavy hand on her shoulder.

‘O that I were a man,’ she thought, as she returned to the house; ‘how much I could do to help him!’

Isabel went to the school-room when she returned, and waited patiently till the little girls were dismissed.

‘Now, then, that tiresome work is over, and I hope you are going to sit idle for a little, and let us have a snug cosy chat, my dear little woman,’ said Isabel, drawing a stool close to Miss Terry.

‘You will not object to my netting my purse, will you? I can always talk better when my fingers are employed.’

‘O dear! oh dear!’ yawned Isabel, ‘I am weary—I am tired, Miss Terry!’

‘What hard work have you been doing, Isabel?’

‘None! it is from lack of work. I am tired of having nothing to do.’

‘Then pray rouse up, for I can find you plenty

of sewing. There are the children's aprons to be braided——'

'Rummage and—O, I forgot! But no, I won't do that. The aprons are just as good minus the braid; besides, I call sewing doing nothing. Now you may laugh, but I am sure I am made for real work. I have a craving for it. I envy every man who has a farm or station to manage; every person, in fact, who has a certain work which must be done. Why, Miss Terry, just look at Kate and me! What is there to occupy us? Mamma will not give up any management to us; though of course we may make puddings and pastry, and stick on flounces, and make up bows, and trim aprons, and change our bonnet trimmings when we are at a standstill. Yes, and we may ride; that is the only pleasurable part—to ride through the air fast. Ah, how much you miss by not riding! And then we must play a few tunes of an evening, and be good girls and go to bed. Dear, dear! is this life? Is this all I am to look forward to, I wonder? And now, too, when I want so much to work! Don't you think I could work—gain money?'

'Yes; no doubt, if necessary.'

'What work?'

'What will be, what is in store for you, of course I know not; but it seems to me, Isabel, there is work at your feet even now.'

'Point it out, you good little Mentor.'

'The work of daily obedience and forbearance, the work of quiet, practical influence which a child may be permitted to exercise even over parents, the work of self-control—even better than the making money.'

'Yes, yes! but, unfortunately, there is no opportunity

for me. I am not ordered to do anything very trying, and so cannot show my powers of obedience ; unless, indeed, you mean those little hourly frets—those wretched little rubs and pinches which seem quite beneath notice. 'Tisn't that. I want something more ; something on a larger scale. O dear ! I *could*, if I might, work for my daddy, and now he is in difficulty, too. Do you know,' she added suddenly, 'I almost wish the worst would come. A great misfortune there would be satisfaction in meeting and bearing. It is, after all, better to bear—I am sure it must be—than little daily vexations !'

'But a great misfortune is generally accompanied by little ones, though we do not see them at a distance—it takes many threads to make a cable, Isabel. When trial comes, I do not doubt you will bear it nobly ; but I should like—I wish you would not suppose that the present brings you no work.'

After a pause, Isabel said, 'Well, set me some work, and I'll try to do it.'

'There is so much time necessarily your own, and there seems here so little field for you to employ yourself for others as you might at home in England, for instance, that my advice to you is, to force yourself into certain work. Read and study, and that not idly and at the spur of the moment, but regularly, as a duty, if there is nothing else to be done. For it is the habit, and not the thing done that is important.'

'If you knew how I hate books, or sewing, or any of those feminine occupations ! How irksome it is to sit still so long—except, indeed, good tough work, such as mending stockings and so on——But see, here are the Veseys and Mr. Fitz. Ah, then he is come back. Well, I was beginning to wonder—and Kate

looked palish. 'Pshaw !' she broke off sharply. 'Do you like scent, and studs, and rings for a man, Miss Terry? I wisht hey would stay away—hospitable now, ain't I? but I am sick of every one. However, perhaps it will cheer up papa, but it will only drive mamma further into the idea that is fixed in her mind about Kate and Mr. Fitz.'

'Don't you yourself expect something there, Isabel?'

'Me? I dont know' (going to the window). 'O, I suppose so. I can't make him out. Deary me, but he will be a funny brother. I shall never like him as I do Tom, incomparable Tom!'

Here Kate came in to tell the news that Mr. and Mrs. Vesey and their brother were come, and mamma was asking them to stay till evening, and that Issy must be sure and change her dress before she made her appearance.

'Nonsense! and she looked at the soiled hem of her gown. 'Dressing once a day is enough, isn't it, Miss Terry?'

'Not if your mother wishes you to do so twice.'

'Ah, No. 1 of my work, I see. Well, I asked for it. Obedience, and so forth, in trifles—that is to say, 'Change your gown, Isabel; smooth your hair, Isabel; avoid rough words, Isabel.' Very well, Miss Terry, I have learnt my lesson; so, good-bye.'

She appeared in the drawing-room in a quarter of an hour in her best dress, and readily took her share in the duty of entertaining their guests.

'What did you come for to-day?' she asked of Mr. Vesey.

'Well done, Isabel; you are polite!' said Kate, *sotto voce*.

'Aw—ha, ha!—come for?—aw, of course, to

the pleasure and all that, you know, of seeing you, aw——'

'Thank you.'

'To tell the truth,' said Mrs. Vesey, laughing, 'it was washing-day, and it is the old song of 'Scrub, scrub,' and so on. We were all glad to bestow ourselves on you and fly from soap-suds, steam, and grumbling women.'

'I guessed as much,' said Isabel. 'Well, and though it is not washing-day with us, it is a kind of black day; we were all in the dumps, I assure you. Kate looked as melancholy as possible, and I have been very nearly going to do all sorts of things. So you see you were glad to come to us, and we are glad of you; and that's a more sensible way of putting it than pleasure, and happiness, and so forth, Mr. Vesey, isn't it? It is being neighbourly.'

'Aw, exactly—new idea that—'pon my word you are very sincere and all that, you know.'

Mr. Lang soon popped in his head. 'Ah, ah! well, glad to see you.' In another half hour he returned dressed for dinner in a clean white jacket and white trousers. He was excessively 'put out' about something, Isabel saw, though as hospitable as usual to his visitors, and evidently amused at Mrs. Vesey's jokes. As soon as the cloth was removed, the cause of his present annoyance burst forth. Mr. Vesey had been speaking of the difficulty he had in managing a certain assigned man of his.

'The thing is, sir,' said Mr. Lang, thumping the table, 'tisn't possible to manage them without power to punish. Sir, the colony is ruined in every way. Why, a man can't get his men punished now. There must be a regular formal trial, and so on. Well, so

far, good ; but get a few hare-brained reformers on the bench, like a certain friend of ours who shall be nameless, and hang it if the matter isn't turned this way and that way, and after all the fellow dismissed in your very teeth as undeserving of punishment ! I should like to know who is the best judge of that. I should like to know if he would not be the better for a flogging. And now here's the rascal sent back to make a fool of me ! 'Twont do, 'twont do, Mr. Vesey ! However, let—hem—a certain gentleman take his own course. I'm sure I don't care, not I. But he'll smart yet under his new-faugled creeds.'

Mrs. Lang inquired who had been tried, but received no answer ; so she turned to Mr. Vesey, and told him how sensitive Mr. Lang was, and naturally enough, at being opposed by so much younger a man than himself, and one not owning half or a quarter his property, &c.

Mr. Vesey wanted to know a great deal about 'boiling down,' and a walk to the farm was proposed, which Kate begged might be extended to Diamond Creek. This was agreed to, and they dispersed for parasols, bonnets, and hats.

CHAPTER XXIV.

STORMS WITHOUT AND WITHIN.

THE walk to Diamond Creek was one of the prettiest about Langville. The trees grew more gracefully in groups, leaving open glades, as it were, between. Then, again, the path led through more tangled scrub—here a banksia, popularly called bottle-brush shrub, with its crimson blossoms; there a low yellow-flowered bush, almost covered with a rich purple creeper; while the ground was studded with bright blue harebells, assuming a more star-like shape and appearance than their drooping sisters in the northern hemisphere. By the creek itself, which was scarcely ever known to be quite dry—whence, perhaps, its appellation of Diamond—grew numberless pale green shrubs, drooping over its banks, with clumps of swamp oaks intermixed.

There was much laughing and chatting among the young people, though Mr. Lang perpetually recurred to the sore subject, and tried to make Mr. Fitz agree with him that convicts were not like other people, and that nothing but the lash had any effect on them.

Mr. Fitz rather took the other side of the question, which irritated Mr. Lang still more; and then both his wife's and eldest daughter's dresses swept the ground—a thing, he said, he never could abide. 'In the

name of common sense, what was the good of wasting so much good cloth ? was it to sweep the roads with ? and so on.

Mrs. Vesey ran off to get a nearer view of the conical ant-hills which abounded in this part of the Bush. She was wishing one of the boys had a tomahawk to cut one in two, that she might see it inside. Willie said it was very hard to cut, and persisted that he had heard of a man turning one into an oven. Kate laughed and said it could not be ; and then the boys ran to appeal to Isabel if Mr. Herbert had not said so. Isabel confirmed their tale—an ant's nest, one of this peculiar kind, had been converted into an oven by some enterprising squatter.

'There's a very threatening cloud,' said Willie ; 'we shall have some thunder before long.'

'Well, truly, it feels ominous ; there really seems not a breath of air !' said Mrs. Vesey, seating herself on a fallen tree. 'I shouldn't like being overtaken in a thunderstorm in the Bush. By-the-bye,' said she, suddenly rising, 'if there is a chance of it, we ought to be going at once.'

'No ; stay the night, pray do !' was repeated on all sides, while Mr. Lang looked around, and 'didn't think it would break yet awhile.'

'I am a shocking coward in a storm,' said Mrs. Vesey.

'O, so am I !' exclaimed Kate. 'But Issy doesn't mind it at all ; I think she enjoys it, and she stands romancing at the window and saying, 'How beautiful !' 'How sublime !' quite in Herbert style.'

'Kate, how can you say so ?'

But Kate was in unusually high spirits, and she persisted in turning the joke against her sister, repeat-

ing many anecdotes at which Mr. Vesey was especially delighted. He laughed, and clapped his hands, and declared that he had always said Miss Isabel Lang was a 'what's-its-name, character, and all that ; and it was good fun, and on his word and honour, he never met with such a girl—never !'

But a distant roll, and a sudden slight shivering among the boughs, broke off the merry talk. It was coming indeed. Willie was right, and with every clap or flash he looked triumphant, and repeated, 'I said so !' while Kate lost her fears in her pleasure at the unavoidable detention of the Vine Lodge party ; and Mrs. Vesey screamed more than once as the lightning flashed. Then it appeared to be going off ; the claps were fainter, the intervals between the flash and the noise longer, and the wind seemed about to make wild work ; already it could be heard rushing up the valley, and then all at once the tall trees swayed about in their topmost branches, leaving the underwood as yet untouched, while the birds uttered a warning shrill cry. Then the wind seemed to stoop and rush with a sweep nearer the ground, taking everything in its way by surprise, and dying off in a low whisper among the wiry swamp oaks.

On reaching the more cleared parts, several head of cattle were seen.

'Hallo, how is this ?' shouted Mr. Lang. 'Run, boys ; see if the rail is down ;' and when Mr. Lang came up to them he heard that it was down. Nothing could be more annoying. There were at least twenty or thirty bullocks let in where he particularly wished they should not be. 'Who left the rails down ?'

The boys denied having been there, and they said it was very likely that 'Magpie,' a certain knowing

bullock, had raised the rail with his horns. It would not be the first time he had done such a thing, and of course all the others would follow.

Mr. Lang was very angry, and declared it couldn't be, for he had ordered pegs to be made for the rail; he knew very well it was one of the two-legged brutes who took a pleasure in doing all the mischief they could.

Isabel, who with Miss Terry had outwalked the others, here waited. 'I am almost sorry to go home. I never saw such an awful sky, I think,' said Miss Terry. Look, Isabel, at that dense blackness, and yet before it there seems to hang a sort of lurid veil of light. The lightning is playing behind it. Isn't it wonderful! Then look there opposite; how far off—far removed from this battle—that deep blue sky looks! and those great rolling masses of clouds! The storm is on both sides, and it will meet. It will be terrific.'

Isabel looked, but gave no answer. Miss Terry cast a quick glance at her, at which Isabel coloured up. 'Isn't it vexing?' she said. 'Some fresh disagreement, evidently! Just as I thought I had contrived so wonderfully well to establish peace and bring him back. I fully expected to see him to-day! Miss Terry, you must really beg him to humour my father a little—he might a little!'

'To whom are you alluding, Isabel?'

'Now, don't pretend, when you see how hurt, how vexed I am! I can't be so philosophic as you are. You don't deceive me though by your elaborate admiration of the storm.'

'Isabel! I don't understand.' But any further conversation was stopped for the present.

The rest of the party coming up, they all passed through this rail, instead of going the longer and prettier way by which they had come. At the end of the next paddock there was another slip-rail, leading to the farm buildings. A man had just climbed it, and was going away ; then, seeing the ladies, Isabel being still foremost, he turned, laid aside his tomahawk, and proceeded to take down the rails.

‘A pretty fellow you are!’ exclaimed Mr. Lang, setting his teeth fast together, and making an inclination with his head in the direction of the other slip rails. ‘And so you couldn’t put the rails up again, eh? but you must let all those wretched beasts into this reserve paddock. Just like you, for a lazy, good-for-nothing vagabond, not worth your salt.’

‘I didn’t either take down or put up the rails! I didn’t come by that way!’ said Lynch, sullenly.

‘’Tis false!—you did. You always come that way. I’ll—I’ll stop your tea and sugar, sir! You are an ill-conditioned, insolent fellow! Go and drive the bullocks out,’ adding an oath ; and he raised a walking cane and flourished it over the man’s head in a threatening way.

One dark look, and in another second the man had picked up his tomahawk, grasping it fiercely.

‘What d’ye mean by that look, sir? Come, come! that wont do,’ said Mr. Lang, hardly able to utter his words from passion, and irritated all the more by Lynch’s now unrestrained insolence.

Again he swung his cane within an inch of the man’s shoulders. One dreadful oath, and the tomahawk was raised.

‘Two can play at that game, and if you will have it, you shall. ’Tis a long bill I owe ye, man!’

But Mr. Fitz, who had come up to them, sprang forward and caught the man's arm just in time. Mr. Vesey also came to his assistance ; while Isabel clung to her father, trying to drag him away. Lynch was white with rage, but he did not resist, and after the first half-uttered vows of revenge, he made no further reply to the gentlemen's advice that he would go quietly back to his hut and make an apology by-and-bye ; and they would try and persuade Mr. Lang to overlook the whole affair.

The father pushed his child away, telling her to mind her own affairs, and muttering his determination to 'get that man on the road-gang.' Then he suddenly turned and offered Mrs. Vesey his arm, still speaking in an excited manner. She excused herself from accepting his help, and dropped behind with Kate ; and the party silently returned to the house.

By this time Mr. Lang had recovered himself, and he joked his wife at looking frightened, saying, she ought to be more accustomed to these little skirmishes, having lived all her life among such people. Then he talked of the weather, and said it would be a stormy night, shouted and coo-ee-ed to Miss Terry and the children, who had lingered behind, and had only now reached the lawn, having escaped the scene at the slip-rails. They ran, and they had hardly gained the verandah when a vivid flash, all forked and jagged, was instantly followed by a loud clap of thunder. The whole sky seemed full of the electric fluid,—the deep rattling roll of the thunder was incessant. The servants dared not cross from the kitchen to the house ; the timid hid themselves behind doors, and the stoutest heart felt it to be awful !

* * * * *

There was wild work among the elements that night ; many a tree was smitten and scathed ; at last the lurid flashes became less vivid, and the thunder rolled more deeply, as if further off. But as the dark heavy clouds broke up, the wind came. How it howled, and boomed down the chimneys ; how the dead trees which had been barked for cleaving, crackled and crashed as it swept through them, while above the rushing sound might be heard the sharp fall of some giant more brittle and more exposed than the rest. It was, in truth, a wild night, as Mr. Lang often remarked to his wife, and it was not till just before dawn that he could sleep. Very troubled and anxious were his thoughts ; his anger had long passed away, it had had its vent, and was now forgotten ; but he lay scheming and planning in hopeless perplexity how to clear himself from pressing difficulties ; how to provide for his family, and keep them still in the situation to which his industry and fortunate investments had brought them ; to preserve all those numerous comforts and luxuries with which he had surrounded them, the fruit of years of labour and toil, yet to be honourable and just in meeting his liabilities. Were it only himself it would be nothing ; he could begin life again ; but his wife and his children, his daughters especially, anything, everything must be done to save them ! It was cruel to think of taking them from Langville. He began to consider his wife's oft-repeated assertion that Kate was sure to marry well, and he wished she would make haste about it. If she were settled, it would materially soften the blow to his wife ; and as for Issy,—he paused at the thought of her name, and with a long-drawn sigh, bid God bless her.

* * * * *

At the time when the storm raged highest might have been seen, by the lightning's flash, a man at the door of a hut heedless of the danger, almost unconscious of the thunder. He stood motionless for some time—motionless save a quivering which every now and then seemed to seize his limbs. He did not once look up, not once did the lightning stir him, but amid the din of the tempest he heard a low voice which spoke to him from within the hut. At first he appeared not to heed it; then there was a sudden tightening of the lips, or a darker frown, a heaving of the bosom, a stamp of the foot; now his face was turned away, then again inclined towards the speaker, as if listening; and all this—every movement and every gesture—was seen plainly by 'Gentleman Bill,' as he sat in the shade of the wall, himself unseen; while the pale, almost livid features of his companion were distinctly marked and brought out with every flash.

'No, no; 'tisin't in human nature to stand it! I declare I'm sorry for ye, Jack. To think of you being under Dan so soon again, and he'll be all the harder, after the welcome he got here that day . . . Ah, well! what must be endured . . . No,—what is it! What can't be cured must be endured! and your back's hard as horn by this time, I suppose. Two roads, however, still lie before ye; the triangle, or the Bush. You see, I came back here to see yourself. 'Pon my soul, I did! and for no one thing besides; believe me or not, as you like! I wanted to tell you; to give you . . .'

'If you've aught to say of 'her,' just have it out, will ye? If—if—I thought—Bill, you'd played me

false, and meddled to take her off me, I'd . . . I needn't say it, though !' said Lynch, turning round and taking a step nearer to Bill. At the last threat his eyes seemed made of fire, and there was something so fearful in his suppressed concentrated passion, and his stalwart frame stood out so big and strong against the stormy sky, for he was just between the open door and Bill's sight—that the little cunning man felt somewhat troubled, and wished himself safe out of that hut.

'Bless us, what a fuss ! Be quiet there !' he said, quietly, and making an effort to stifle his chuckling laugh, as much excited by nervousness just then as by his usual enjoyment in working up a frenzy in others. 'I certainly did coax the little maid down to Allen's; and what if I did ? She'd have been killed outright at home. I found her black and blue ; not able to walk ;—and in the Bush. Didn't I tell you she was at Allen's ?'

'You did so. Bnt when I went there after work, she was gone. Couldn't get no account of her at all ; and Bill, folks do say that——'

'Folks ! let 'em say ! What do they say ? or what don't they say, for that matter ? But be more civil, or I'll take no more trouble to bring you news.'

'Speak out, unless you wish me to do you some harm, man !'

'You are put out, Jack ! Well 'tain't pleasant I should think to be con-templating that pleasant little accident—so, I'll be patient. If you'd take a smoke, 'twould ease your mind uncommon. Fine thing 'baccoy is for the temper ; Quakers smoke on the sly always. Well, well, don't hitch about your shoulders that way. I'm coming to it—easy, easy ; after all, I've not much to say. Surely, Jack, you don't go for to say you really

pin your faith to any slip of a female, now, do ye? Why man, they're every one of them alike. You think Nelly prefers you. Ay, ay, so she did. You're right there. But put her in the way of something better; what then? Nelly likes smartery—all girls do! A pretty ribbon, or a gown; and Jack Lynch was a poor sweetheart that way.'

'Will you hold your cursed nonsense?' Lynch growled.

'Bless the fellow! Mustn't I use any figuring speech! I'm just a polishing off and ornamenting the facts; for seeing how you are in a devil's humour, perhaps you'll go ramping mad, if I speak too sudden. But keep quiet there, Jack! and I'm coming. Well, last time I saw Nelly, she had a fine new gown quite the go, and a blue ribbon, as blue as her eyes. My! she looked dainty jolly! Ay, ay, thinks I, and where did that smartery come from? So says I, 'Nelly, my darling, got any message for any of your beaux, down away; because,' says I, 'I'm going back soon.' 'Beaux, indeed!' she said, so scornful; 'No, Bill, I've no message, and no beaux;' and off she walked, as fine as my lady. 'But for Jack,' says I, 'poor Jack;' following her, you see. 'I've something very particular indeed, I want to tell Jack,' she says; 'but it mustn't be yet, not yet. Only Bill, you may say, I'm got into a very good place indeed, and am like to do well, and I hope he'll do well,' says she, quite proud like. 'Pon that, somebody spoke to me, and when I turned away again, she was gone. I searched everywhere, I asked of every one, I couldn't see no more of her. Only they said as for certain she was in company with some up country drays, going to live at some place.'

'And where was this, where you saw her?'

'Where? Ah! Jack, you're the sharp 'un! Well, 'twas just near that public, stands back a little from the road, called the Camp House. But where she was going is just what I don't know, you see.'

'That's false—you do know; you are too sharp not to find out that for your own curiosity.'

'All I made out from the people of the inn—and you may go and ask for yourself—was, that one of the draymen was a pretty, likely youth, and seemingly uncommon sweet on the girl, and she was all as friendly with him. Now, don't go and shake your big fists at me, or any one else. 'Twont do no good, man! Whistle her down! Not worth a thought—an idle jade! I turned right away, at the risk of my own business, to come back here and give you scent! That's what I call acting honourable, and like a gentleman! Now do as you like—only—now 'tis come to this here point with you, if I were you, I'd let no consideration for her keep me from just following my own way If'—he presently continued, finding Lynch made no remark, 'you had a mind to go through they infernal lashes, just on account of keeping straight for her—well—I couldn't advise you no ways to it—after what I've seen.'

Lynch left his post at the door, and took his seat on a low stool, burying his head in his hands with his elbows on his knees. There was a long silence. Bill grew tired of it, and the darkness prevented him from watching Lynch. He moved towards the door, and looked out. 'Stormy night, I guess!' Then still standing there as Lynch had done, still smoking his pipe, and leaning against the side-post, as if too weak or lazy to stand unsupported,—he spoke of a friend of his, who had taken to the Bush. He had come across

him quite by accident, he said, and was almost persuaded into joining him. It might be a short life, but at all events, it was free, and had plenty of stir and fun. Full of adventure ! ' Fancy my chum sending a message to some old crony of a rich settler who had offended them, that he was a marked man ! meaning they meant to shoot him ; so deuced cool, the sending him fair notice ! ' and he chuckled. ' That's the way, Lynch, depend on it. Clear off all old scores ; enjoy liberty, instead of such slavery and crawling life. Pah ! and if the end should be unpleasant ; but 'tis easy to avoid *that* by fighting desperate at the last. But, take it at the worst, man, one death's as good as another. Die game ! eh, Jack ! Why before that comes, you'd ride free and like a conqueror, terrifying every one ; and make a name, ' Lynch, the celebrated bushranger ! ' eh, Jack. But I say, there's no end to this firing up yonder ; some mischief will come somewhere. I'm tired, and by your leave, I'll just turn in ; I'm going to sleep in Andrew's hut. So good-night, old fellow ! Cheer up, and be hearty.'

Bill stepped out lightly, but turned to look once again at that bowed, still figure. Then a vivid flash dazzled him, and he quickened his steps to the other hut, where soon, wrapped in a rug, he was fast asleep. Lynch was alone ; bitter thoughts and suspicions crowded on him, while those memories he had before rejected, returned not now, in this his dark hour of need. After the first rush of opposing and confusing feelings, only one idea, one purpose remained. It grew, and strengthened rapidly. When at last he raised his head, all was over, all resolved. He got up, and looked out. It was quiet, as far as human life was concerned. Every one was gone to his rest. He marked that the

thunderstorm had passed, but that the wind was in all its fury ; and he said to himself that it would be dangerous work among the trees. He picked up his hat, over which he had nearly stumbled, as it lay on the floor, then felt for his clasp knife, and fastened a small tomahawk into his leathern belt. He took out from his bed a red handkerchief, which he knotted round his throat with a bitter scowl ; felt on the shelf for a box of matches, and a small piece of tobacco ; and then he went to the door, but paused there for a moment—looked back, as if listening, and pressing his hand to his forehead, he passed out. He shut the door carefully, placing a stone before it to keep it close. Once he waited, and even uttered a low whistle, but checked it almost directly, and with a look as if some bitter recollection had crossed him, setting his mouth in a way which gave a very forbidding character to his face, and breasting the wind with strong, firm steps, he very soon passed out of the cleared part of the Langville estate, and plunged into the Bush.

CHAPTER XXV.

SOMETHING IN THE WIND.

A FEW days after the storm, Kate, Isabel, and Miss Terry were sitting together, each apparently occupied in sewing. But a grave silence had been so long unbroken that one of the little girls coming suddenly to the window, startled them.

‘Two gentlemen riding up the road!’ she said.

On which Kate coloured a little, and shook out her flounces, and twisted her bracelet.

‘Mr. Herbert and Mr Farrant,’ again said Sophy.

Isabel glanced from Kate to Miss Terry, and caught a deep flush on the face of the latter, though she was bending very quietly over her work as before, and did not indulge in any of those little manœuvres Kate had begun.

Kate rose and went to the window.

‘Was ever a house so pestered with callers?’ she said, pettishly; ‘I thought for once what a nice quiet morning we were having; and what is the use of Mr. Herbert’s coming now? Papa is sure to speak about Lynch and that other affair. Really, I do wish he would stay away!’

‘Kate!’ remonstrated Isabel, with her finger raised, but so that Miss Terry did not see it.

Kate stepped quickly into the verandah, saying something about going to mamma.

‘Poor Kate ! It doesn’t look very well, do you think so, now he is here not to call for so many days,’ remarked Isabel.

‘I fancied his manner very disagreeable the last time he came. I wondered how Kate could bear it. But isn’t she invited to stay there ?’

‘Yes, at some indefinite time. Well—well !’

Here the two visitors entered. Both shook hands first with Isabel ; she was nearest to the door.

Mr. Farrant put down a parcel. ‘Some new music,’ he said. ‘He should beg for a trial of it, by-and-bye. He had to visit the sick man living in the Bush behind Langville, but if he might do so, he would call in as he returned.

‘Are you in such a hurry to go now,’ Isabel said, somewhat awkwardly, and stepping towards the window, wanting to bring Mr. Farrant out that the other two might remain together ; hearing footsteps she concluded that he did so. She began picking some flower, saying, as carelessly as she could, ‘What music is it ; sacred ?’

‘What music do you mean ? Don’t waste the flowers so, and don’t throw them away. Give me that bud.’

It was not Mr. Farrant’s voice, and Isabel cast a hurried look through the window, in time to see that gentleman in the act of leaving the room. Mr. Herbert smiled as her eye came back to his.

‘He means to spend the evening here. But I can only spare a short time,’ he said, placing his bud in his button-hole with care.

‘Didn’t know you were up to all that,’ she laughed.

'We are coming on quickly! How long will it last, I wonder? But come, this won't do. We mustn't leave her.'

'Miss Terry is going to try the song,' Mr. Herbert said, drawing Isabel's hand on his arm as he spoke. 'Have you a parasol? for I want you to come in the garden, Isabel.'

'I'll fetch one;' and she ran in at the window quickly. 'Why is this? Why don't you come?' she said to Miss Terry.

'I want to look over this; mayn't I?' and again Miss Terry blushed.

'Unkind thing! Well—I don't understand your tactics at all. But you will come presently, come to the garden—do!'

'I will if you so much wish it.'

'I wish it? Nonsense! You make me cross! Absurd!'

She took a parasol from the hall and went out at the door, coming round to Mr. Herbert, who still waited for her on the verandah.

'Hush—wait!' he said; and both stood for a moment to hear Miss Terry's voice.

'Isn't it magnificent?' Isabel said.

'I have only once before heard a voice I liked better,' he answered.

'Liked better! You are impartial. You actually allow that there may be better? Well, of course, my experience is none. I never heard any at all like it, nor could I have fancied anything so beautiful.'

'Not more so than Farrant's?'

'Perhaps not. No—but different,' and Isabel stooped her face aside, so that it was hidden from him.

After a little silence she said—'Well, Mr. Herbert?'

'Well, Isabel. But what does that 'well' signify?'

'Only—what about going to live at the Station, and giving up Warratah Lodge, and so on?'

'I meant to tell you. Letters from home—from England—have arrived, considerably relieving my mind. I hope to weather these difficulties and to struggle on, and then—it can't last for ever—better days will come. We shall begin with a new system altogether.'

'Yes; those who can weather it, as you say. Many will be swamped, though.'

'Come! you are turned sad-hearted now, Isabel. Is your father very uneasy? I fancied he was worried and careworn?'

'Very likely. Every one is anxious; he not more so than others.' There was a shade of annoyance, even resentment, in her tone, which he did not understand.

'I dare say not! I meant nothing!' he said, kindly. By the way, Jack Lynch, Isabel! I was so grieved to hear of it! grieved and surprised, for I knew he meant to'

'He was most insolent! Why, he would have killed papa! Even you cannot defend his conduct!' she said quickly.

'I do not. I know the man is capable of any excess, if—if—provoked. But I grieve; for I also know, or believe, that he might have done well. A very singular character! And the girl—have you heard of her?'

'Nothing beyond rumours. That is shocking!' she said; 'some one has taken advantage of her want of wit, I am very sure. Poor Nelly; I hope almost she

is dead ! I hope we shall hear ; we still inquire ; and Dr. Mornay promises to leave no stone unturned.'

'Better not ! Let it alone. There is nothing to hear, nothing to be done,' said Mr. Herbert.

'I don't see that at all ! and I could not rest till I had tried every means to find out,' Isabel returned with warmth.

'Again, I say, I advise you not ! Ah, there are the children !' and he greeted them very kindly.

'Well, Isabel, and how does the wooing go on ? I mean Mr. Fitz !—Ah ! is it a sore subject ? I beg your pardon. Do you mean . . . '

'I mean nothing, and I know nothing. Kate has an invitation to go there soon.'

'Poor Kate ! You won't believe me, but the less you have to do there the better. But I can't afford to quarrel, nor will I have any frowns, for I must soon pay a visit to that station, and I came for a nice talk. Isabel, I have something to—something I wish to say to you—'

'No, don't ! I know ! Please don't make a preface a yard long and look so grave ! I can't bear any weighty secrets just now. I assure you I am a creature of many moods, and to-day my mood does not incline to bear or to hear.'

'You always put me off so !' and Mr. Herbert sighed. 'Well—O ! here's some one already !' he spoke impatiently, hearing footsteps coming along the gravel-path, and as he stood behind a vine-covered trellis, he could not see who it was.

'Why, it is Miss Terry !' Isabel said, with a saucy look at him. 'What of the song ?' she added, as Miss Terry came up.

'Beautiful ! you must hear it. It is for two voices ;

and turning, they all paced slowly up and down the vine-walk, the conversation being principally kept up by Mr. Herbert and Miss Terry, so much so, that at last, with a sly smile, Isabel lingered a step behind, and then turning round the corner, she was at the top of the garden by the arbour with the young ones before they missed her.

When, after some time, Isabel, believing she had managed beautifully to secure a quiet *tête-à-tête* for the two, reappeared in the drawing-room, she was rather surprised to find them all there, and Mr. Herbert actually employed in holding a skein of silk for Kate to wind. This was a wonderful stretch of politeness, Isabel thought ; and she smiled, amused to see Kate's evident gratification, and the pretty becoming pink which mantled on her cheeks as he paid her compliments on her skilful fingers.

'Well ! what will not love do !' Isabel thought. 'Why, he's becoming that domestic, tame animal, a lady's man !'

She looked at Miss Terry, who was sewing, again the picture of serene content.

Mrs. Lang was talking in a plaintive tone of the bad times, and of Lynch's dark threats, and the great increase of annoyance by bushrangers, when Mr. Farrant entered the room. He was tired, he said, and had nearly lost his way, which made him nervous.

'What is it, my dear mother ?' Isabel said, after receiving sundry hints by gesture and look, and observing Mrs. Lang glance uneasily from Mr. Farrant to herself.

Mrs. Lang gave her daughter's work a little pull, while she turned with a great effort to be quite at

ease, and asked Mr. Farrant if he would like a glass of wine or some lemon sirrup and water.

‘What! does my dearly beloved sock annoy you, Mrs. Lang?’ exclaimed Isabel, rather perversely, regardless of all the hints to hide it up. But Isabel was a little ‘put out.’ She did not know herself why exactly, but felt much disposed to contradict and ‘be cross,’ as children say.

‘Hardly drawing-room work—lady’s work,’ suggested Mrs. Lang, in a low and fluttered voice; for though a very slave to the opinions of others on such subjects, and having a great notion of these two gentlemen’s super-particularity, she still was rather vain of Isabel’s open rebellion. She fancied that it sometimes pleased, and had grown at last to be more easy under it, as ‘Issy’s way, and quite original!’

‘Well, I appeal to the judgment of the company! Votes, true and honest! Is the knitting this sock, destined for William Lang, Esq., when he goes out after cattle or fishing, &c., an offence to the taste and the associations of the present company and to this room—the drawing-room? for I understand mamma that in the morning-room it would not have been so shocking.’

‘How absurd you are, Issy!’ said Kate.

‘Look at this wool!’ Isabel went on; ‘it is pretty and soft, grey and white; and these pins, surely what can be prettier, being of ivory, alias bone, neat and ladylike; and if the leg and foot be not of fairy dimensions; we English—no, Anglo-Australian, that’s it—are proud of such a stout leg. Come! no fighting off! Miss Terry, your opinion, please!’

‘I confess to a predilection in favour of knitting and netting,’ said Mr. Farrant, stooping to examine

the sock. 'And how wondrously comfortable! Anti-rheumatic, I am sure. I envy Mr. Lang the ——'

'The socks or the leg?' put in Isabel, while at the same moment Mrs. Lang said, 'I am sure, Mr. Farrant, Issy would be most happy, quite gratified to make you such a pair; that is, to fit you, if—if——'

'Hold, mamma, if you please! I have been about three months already, and this is the first sock. You know I am no worker. I hate all twiddle-dee and twiddle-dum over crochet and canvas, and all that sort of work; I make and I mend needful garments as a strict, stringent duty; and knitting such as this, I keep for odd, idle moments, when I am too dull to enjoy talking, and yet have to sit up, company fashion.'

'As now?' said Mr. Herbert, with a curl of his lip.

'Come, no sneers at me! As for you, it is Hercules, and I don't know who. I shall see you working in the ground of some immense chair-back soon. But the question is not decided! Is this admissible; or, shall I take my sock and myself away? no great punishment to either party, perhaps!'

'No, since Mr. Farrant is so kind as to——' Mrs. Lang began.

'On no account,' said Mr. Farrant. 'Stay, Miss Isabel Lang, and knit on.'

'And you?' Isabel looked at Miss Terry.

'Certainly,' was the answer.

'Yes, stay, or you will be exalting yourself into a martyr, suffering persecution, and ready to sacrifice yourself in behalf of ugly work, because no one else likes it,' said Mr. Herbert.

'Thank you!' said Isabel, rising and making a low curtsy. But the colour flushed up and then faded,

and there was a little tremor of the lips too, which told of something not far from pain at Mr. Herbert's home thrust.

Isabel was soon very earnest over her knitting, saying she had made a fault somewhere and must find it out.

Meanwhile Kate's skein being done, Mr. Herbert called for another, and overcame her scruples by protesting that he quite enjoyed it.

'Ah, and this soft lamb's-wool is still prettier than silk,' he said, as she produced some delicately shaded skeins. I always think a heap of these wools—German, are they not?—a singularly happy ornament on a table. I don't care much for such work when done; I think it is thrown away, nine cases out of ten; but all the accompaniments, the etcetera, I like. The frame I see some ladies use, is quite a piece of furniture!'

This led to Kate's alluding to some great wool embroiderers, some ladies, known to Mr. Herbert and the Langs, in Sydney.

Isabel looked up now and then in great surprise, to find him talking in that tone, evidently desiring to please—and to Kate, too! To Kate, with whom he rarely exchanged a dozen words. And she, losing the slight shade of trouble which had been on her face before, was looking quite her best, very pretty!

Mr. Farrant had led off Miss Terry to the piano-forte, and there they were intently discussing something—the new song, she supposed. But Isabel had a feeling very new to her, of being somewhat overlooked. As she sat brooding over the little shadow which had in some strange way crept into her heart, she chafed and felt angry. 'What are they all about, I wonder? What fun if I could but really read each heart now at

this moment ! Evidently Mr. Herbert and Miss Terry understand one another. What is he doing with Kate ? and have I frightened away my admirer, said to be ? No one would guess it from to-day, I am sure ! I doubt if I should sit quite so content as Miss Terry does ; actually she seems flattered and pleased. Pooh, there should be some little difference in the eye or something ! A good thing not to be jealous ! Perhaps it is. But one may go too far ! Well, I shouldn't like it ; no, I shouldn't !

As this last idea rose very emphatically, even to her very lips, and caused her to shake her head a little, though very unconsciously, it attracted Mr. Herbert's notice, and Kate's also, as she followed the direction of his glance.

'Issy, what are you saying to yourself ?' said Kate. 'I guess, though, what it was ; not very difficult with your face, is it ? By-the-bye, Mr. Herbert, speaking of the Moretons, did it ever strike you that our Isabel is like Ada ?'

'No, indeed ! I take Ada Moreton to be as perfect a specimen of her peculiar kind or type as can be seen.' Mr. Herbert spoke in his old somewhat dogmatizing tone, which Kate never understood ; but he did not heed her blank look.

'It is a very common hackneyed phrase to call a pretty woman a butterfly, or a humming-bird. But I never see Ada Moreton without the aptness of the simile striking me ; touching, skimming over everything, scarce alighting on anything ; pretty, graceful, and bright ; tempting youths to follow, and, if they can, make her a prisoner ; yet if caught——'

'Well ! if caught ; what then ?' Isabel put in, rather sharply.

'Ah! I didn't think you were listening,' Mr. Herbert said. 'I know of old how you swear by Ada Moreton.'

'My first notion of prettiness. But you'

'Never admired her,' he concluded, decidedly, and with rather more emphasis than the words or the subject seemed to merit.

'I confess I don't see in what way Ada and Issy are alike,' said Mrs. Lang, as if comparing them in her mind, and looking at Isabel.

Mr. Herbert uttered a short, dry, rather contemptuous laugh, and nearly broke Kate's skein, which had diminished to only a few threads. 'Ada is all prettiness, no rough point, not a corner anywhere. She speaks and sings like a musical-box; never was cross or blunt in her life;—at all events, in company.'

'Enough!—quite enough to prove your assertion. Thank you!' said Isabel.

Kate laughed. Mrs. Lang was puzzled.

'What a very sincere person Anna Moreton is. Don't you think so?' Kate ventured to remark to Mr. Herbert.

'Sincerity is a quality which covers a multitude of faults,' said Mr. Farrant, coming up to them.

'True,' said Mr. Herbert, who had finished his task, and was now leaning back in his chair so far, that it threatened to lose its balance every moment. 'True,' he said, looking up at the ceiling; 'yet there is a something which passes for sincerity, which is really nothing more than a total want of self-restraint; a forgetfulness of any consideration but its own headlong impulse. This outpouring of temper and opinion, without reference to subject, person, or time, passes current for sincerity, but it is a mistake——'

•

'Thank you again, Mr. Herbert!' said Isabel, with a heightened colour.

'I assure you,' and down came the chair with a sudden thump—'I assure you I meant nothing at all. However . . . there is a proverb about a cap fitting—and——'

'Fitting so wonderfully well, that I take it, you see; and I'll wear it, and carry it off at once, in order to ruminate soberly on your able definition of sincerity.'

She was in the verandah in another moment, and passing quickly to the work-room, from whence she intended escaping to her own bed-room. But she was caught. Just as she reached the work-room door opening on the passage, which led from the front hall, Mr. Herbert appeared coming out of the drawing-room, a much shorter way than hers.

'Isabel, stay. Indeed, you must not run away. I want you, seriously. I don't know when I may be able to come again—and—I must speak to you; tell you something.'

They were at the furthest end of the passage, where, when all the doors were shut as now, it was rather dark. Isabel saw that he was a little nervous, and she had no wish for him to read her countenance, feeling thoroughly unsteady and upset. She tried to laugh, and said she could not stay—she was busy—and so on.

'I have not really hurt or annoyed you, Isabel; surely not?' he said, taking her hand.

'Dear me, no! Annoyed or hurt because you were rude! That would be odd!'

'Rude! I wasn't; I could not be rude. Come, you shall tell me what ails you. What is it, Isabel?'

And do come back to the work-room, I really must say something to you.'

'I know all about it; and I don't wish to hear you—not now, at least.'

'You know!—you know!'

'Yes, indeed! Whatever my sincerity may be, I can't affect ignorance of this. It may sound odd, I dare say; but the truth is, I do know. And what is more, I am glad; and as you must know, with all your discrimination, I give hearty consent.'

Her manner was flurried and she pressed his hand a little. He was holding hers tightly, and now it became a warm grasp, while he tried to see her face in the doubtful light, and strange varying emotions passed over his features. But she kept it turned away, and presently covered it with her handkerchief, and something very like a suppressed catching sob came.

'O dear, how silly!' she exclaimed, trying to pull away her hand; 'do let me go! please—please! There, it is Mr. Farrant coming, I hear him. Let me go. Please do, Mr. Herbert!' she went on more and more urgently.

'You shall;—well, you shall. But some other time—I won't tease you now. Farrant told me that he meant to see your father to-night. How nervous you are, child. Not afraid of me, surely? I may come to-morrow, Isabel?'

'Of course; only I thought you couldn't. But I see—I understand! Yes, come; come, by all means! But O dear, how funny it all is; and then there is this evening. I must go, or I shall be crazy.'

He let go her hand and she turned away; then came back again, laid her hand on his arm, and tried to speak, but burst into agitated tears, and ran off as fast as she could,

Mr. Herbert was soon seen riding away. Isabel watched him, as in the quiet of her own room she stilled her tears, feeling heartily ashamed of herself, and very guilty at leaving the drawing-room.

‘But they are singing again. Miss Terry will talk for me. So to-morrow papa is to be told and consulted. I shall triumph! My pet scheme! Poor Kate, it is very sad for her, though! I could fight that puppy! Flattering and wooing her, and now turning the cold shoulder, at the first scent of poverty. The others are of different metal, it seems. But I can’t like it! I can’t take it in! I don’t like him as much as I thought I did. Well! I am not bound. I can say ‘No.’—To-night! Horrid prospect! Will it be ‘No’ or ‘Yes?’ I will not be listening to the singing! None of those old songs! I won’t have it! It is not fair. It blinds me. I’ll sit here and think! Such a serious step requires serious thought. And how very kind Mr. Herbert was to me! He guesses it all, I am sure!’

So Isabel went on, trying hard but in vain to reduce her thoughts to shape and order, and to decide on the pros and cons, whether it should be ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ to the proposal which Mr. Farrant was to make this evening. But her ideas perpetually wandered from this to the other affair, her own darling scheme. She must behave better to Mr. Herbert next time. ‘He meant to be kind and friendly, and she had all but repulsed him and all the confidence he tried to give her. Why was it that she felt so shy in hearing his story? It was odd! Again she passed in review the two gentlemen, and again she liked Mr. Herbert as a ‘friend’ over and over again the best; and again she decided that ‘friends’ were far pleasanter than ‘lovers.’

She only hoped Miss Terry appreciated him properly. Isabel somewhat doubted this. Now she was inclined to resent Miss Terry's measured expressions, and her very unruffled though conscious manner.

'Well—the dinner bell will soon ring! They don't seem to have missed me, anyhow,' she said, as, some time having elapsed, she felt rather weary of sitting still and 'thinking.' 'Thinking is dreadfully tiresome, wearying work, I am sure.'

Here she heard the boys stamping along the passage. Her door was touched and opened.

'Issy!' said Willie, peeping in. 'O, here you are! Where in the world are all the rest? Not a soul in the drawing-room! Farrant,—is he here? Going to stay, do you say? Eh, Issy, blush away!—that's it, is it? What fun! Is it settled?'

'No, no, Willie; pray don't talk so! Besides, what do you mean? What is there to settle?'

'Fiddle-dum!—as if you didn't know? But I say, Issy, what will the governor say, eh?'

LONDON:
SAVILL AND EDWARDS, PRINTERS,
CHANDOS-STREET.

BY THE REV. CHARLES KINGSLEY,

**RECTOR OF EVERSLEY, CHAPLAIN IN ORDINARY
TO THE QUEEN.**

MISCELLANIES.

Second Edition. Two Volumes, 18s.

THE SAINTS' TRAGEDY.

Third Edition. 5s.

HYPATIA.

Third Edition. 6s.

YEAST, A PROBLEM.

Fourth Edition, with a New Preface. 5s.

ANDROMEDA AND OTHER POEMS.

Second Edition. 5s.

SERMONS ON NATIONAL SUBJECTS.

Second Edition. Two Series, 5s. each.

THE GOOD NEWS OF GOD : SERMONS.

Second Edition. 6s.

TWENTY-FIVE VILLAGE SERMONS.

Fifth Edition. 2s. 6d.

SERMONS FOR THE TIMES.

Cheaper Edition. 3s. 6d.

LONDON : JOHN W. PARKER AND SON, WEST STRAND.

By the Author of 'The Heir of Redclyffe.'

THE HEIR OF REDCLYFFE.

Twelfth Edition. 6s.

HEARTSEASE.

Seventh Edition. 6s.

DYNEVOR TERRACE.

Third Edition. 6s.

THE DAISY CHAIN.

Third Edition. Two Vols., 10s. 6d.

THE LANCES OF LYNWOOD.

Second Edition. 3s.

THE LITTLE DUKE.

Fourth Edition. 1s. 6d.

LONDON: JOHN W. PARKER AND SON, WEST STRAND.

- 9



And do come back to the work-room, I really must say something to you.'

'I know all about it; and I don't wish to hear you—not now, at least.'

'You know!—you know!'

'Yes, indeed! Whatever my sincerity may be, I can't affect ignorance of this. It may sound odd, I dare say; but the truth is, I do know. And what is more, I am glad; and as you must know, with all your discrimination, I give hearty consent.'

Her manner was flurried and she pressed his hand a little. He was holding hers tightly, and now it became a warm grasp, while he tried to see her face in the doubtful light, and strange varying emotions passed over his features. But she kept it turned away, and presently covered it with her handkerchief, and something very like a suppressed catching sob came.

'O dear, how silly!' she exclaimed, trying to pull away her hand; 'do let me go! please—please! There, it is Mr. Farrant coming, I hear him. Let me go. Please do, Mr. Herbert!' she went on more and more urgently.

'You shall;—well, you shall. But some other time—I won't tease you now. Farrant told me that he meant to see your father to-night. How nervous you are, child. Not afraid of me, surely? I may come to-morrow, Isabel?'

'Of course; only I thought you couldn't. But I see—I understand! Yes, come; come, by all means! But O dear, how funny it all is; and then there is this evening. I must go, or I shall be crazy.'

He let go her hand and she turned away; then came back again, laid her hand on his arm, and tried to speak, but burst into agitated tears, and ran off as fast as she could.,



She only hoped Miss Terry appreciated him properly. Isabel somewhat doubted this. Now she was inclined to resent Miss Terry's measured expressions, and her very unruffled though conscious manner.

'Well—the dinner bell will soon ring! They don't seem to have missed me, anyhow,' she said, as, some time having elapsed, she felt rather weary of sitting still and 'thinking.' 'Thinking is dreadfully tiresome, wearying work, I am sure.'

Here she heard the boys stamping along the passage. Her door was touched and opened.

'Issy!' said Willie, peeping in. 'O, here you are! Where in the world are all the rest? Not a soul in the drawing-room! Farrant,—is he here? Going to stay, do you say? Eh, Issy, blush away!—that's it, is it? What fun! Is it settled?'

'No, no, Willie; pray don't talk so! Besides, what do you mean? What is there to settle?'

'Fiddle-dum!—as if you didn't know? But I say, Issy, what will the governor say, eh?'

